V 9

PARTISAN REVIEW

PR

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1942

Ellen Terhune
a story by
EDMUND WILSON

PHILIP RAHV
On the Decline of Naturalism

GEORGE ORWELL
London Letter

DWIGHT MACDONALD
The Eisenstein Tragedy

The Music of Poetry
an essay by
T. S. ELIOT

6

35¢ A COPY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tracts for the Times:

1. Henry David Thoreau's
CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

The 90-year old essay that shaped Gandhi's thinking. . . . A handsome new edition by the 5x8 Press. . . . "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison." "I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right." " Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it."

2. The story of the Italian underground movement:
ITALY AGAINST FASCISM

A realistic history of the anti-fascist groups that have been working in Italy since the March on Rome; plus an 8-point statement of the political and economic program these groups are agreed upon; plus a severe and brilliant critique of American propaganda now being directed at Italy. . . . Published by the new Italian journal, **Quaderni Italiani**. . . . "Much the best thing I've seen on Italy."—Dwight Macdonald.

Order from Partisan Review Book Service . . . 25c for both Pamphlets . . . Postage paid by us.

The next issue of P.R. will be devoted to

"the new failure of nerve"

A series of articles analyzing the obscurantist tendencies gathering force in the cultural world today: the revolt against reason and the scientific method; the exaltation of mystery as a mode of knowledge; the recrudescence of reactionary theories about "human nature"; the revival of religiosity and supernaturalism; the abandonment of the historical for the metaphysical approach; the new socio-theology of Original Sin.

Partial List of Contents:

John DEWEY: Anti-Naturalism in Extremis

Sidney HOOK: The New Failure of Nerve

Ruth BENEDICT: Human Nature is Not a Trap

Ernest NAGEL: Malicious Philosophies of Science

Richard V. CHASE: The Huxley-Heard Paradise

Dwight MACDONALD: The Conservative Revival

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PARTISAN REVIEW

VOLUME IX, No. 6 NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1942

THE MUSIC OF POETRY	450	*T. S. Eliot*
ELLEN TERHUNE	466	*Edmund Wilson*
POLITICAL NOTES	476	*Dwight Macdonald*
ON THE DECLINE OF NATURALISM	483	*Philip Rahv*
LONDON LETTER	494	*George Orwell*
POLICE SERGEANT MALONE AND THE SIX DEAD DRINKERS	499	*Horace Gregory*
FILM CHRONICLE: THE EISENSTEIN TRAGEDY	502	*Dwight Macdonald*
BOOKS		
The Spiritual Underground	529	*William Phillips*
Poets, English and American	532	*Clement Greenberg*
Button, Button	537	*Robert Penn Warren*
Miss Rukeyser's Marine Poem	540	*Weldon Kees*
Portrait of an Historian	540	*Melvin J. Lasky*
LETTERS	543	

Editors: CLEMENT GREENBERG, DWIGHT MACDONALD, GEORGE L. K. MORRIS, WILLIAM PHILLIPS, PHILIP RAHV. Business Manager: NANCY MACDONALD.

The articles in PARTISAN REVIEW, *whether written by editors or contributors, represent the point of view of the individual author, and not necessarily of the editors.*

PARTISAN REVIEW is published at 45 Astor Place, New York, N. Y.

PARTISAN REVIEW is published six times a year. Subscription: $1.50 yearly; Canada, $1.65; other foreign countries, $1.80. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Copyright November, 1942, by PARTISAN REVIEW. Reentered as second-class matter, January 20, 1940, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Music of Poetry*

T. S. Eliot

I DEBATED with myself for some time before electing, for this occasion, to talk about the subject the nature of which is vaguely indicated by my title. Circumstance and conscience conspire, in these times, to direct our attention to matters of a wider scope and perhaps of more general interest. It seems almost impertinent, even as a man of letters, to concern oneself with a purely literary subject: I find myself tempted to the opposite impertinence of talking about matters beyond my range. Even within my own field, there seem to be questions of greater urgency and relevance: the place of literature in culture, the place of culture itself in the society of the future, and all the educational problems implicit in the cultivation of letters. There are many problems of literature and the arts which lead towards political, sociological and religious speculation; and the question which is in every mind—the question of the condition of society after the war, of its limitations, necessities and possibilities, of its inevitable or of its desirable change—this insistent question might suggest, as a more suitable subject for a formal address on a distinguished foundation, some discussion of the place of literature in a changing world.

If I have resisted this temptation, it is for two reasons, the second of which supports the first. At a time when everyone is interested in the phenomena of change, and when any reflexions on these phenomena, whether analytical or constructive, may command attention if only by stimulating controversy and eliciting contradictory opinion, there is a particular need to consider, now and then, problems which only seem unimportant, because they are no more important now than they always have been and always will be. The prime interest of a practitioner of verse like myself must be in the immediate future; not that we regard the future with either hope or fear, or are moved by either the aspiration

*The third W. P. Ker Memorial Lecture delivered in the University of Glasgow, February 24, 1942. Reprinted by permission of the author.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or despair of excelling dead masters, but simply because our first concern is always the perennial question, what is to be done next? what direction is unexplored? what is there to be done immediately before us, which has not been done already, once and for all, as well as it can be done? When absorbed in these investigations, the poet is no more concerned with the social consequences than is the scientist in his laboratory—though without the context of the use to society, neither the writer nor the scientist could have the conviction which sustains him. This concern with the future requires a concern with the past also: for in order to know what there is to be done we need a pretty accurate knowledge of what has been done already; and this again leads to examination of those principles and conditions which hold good always, to distinguish them from those which only held good for one or another group of our predecessors.

If my subject is justifiable by its permanence, it is also the more fitting on a foundation designed to perpetuate the memory of W. P. Ker. I never met Ker: it is a cause of regret to me that I missed the one opportunity offered me, which came only a few weeks before his last journey to Switzerland. But I found myself asking the question: what would Ker prefer me to talk about, supposing that he could appraise my abilities and my limitations? Not a subject requiring a parade of learning, certainly; for he would be the first to detect, and the most qualified to denounce, such an imposture. I can think of no other great scholar who would have been more certain to perceive both the difference and the relation between his area and mine, and to condemn any trespass from one area to the other. He was a great scholar who was also a great humanist, who was always aware that the end of scholarship is understanding, and that the end of understanding poetry is enjoyment, and that this enjoyment is gusto disciplined by taste. He was remarkable, not only for the comprehensiveness and accuracy of his knowledge of mediaeval and modern European literature, a knowledge with a firm basis of Latin and Greek, but for his ability to enjoy the most diverse species of it, and for the intuition, fortified by a great memory, which enabled him to detect analogies or relationships which few other men, even as learned as he, would have noticed. Each compartment of his learning was at the disposal of every other: a line of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

modern verse could take him back to Iceland or Provence, or the rhythm of a popular Spanish ballad could evoke half a dozen modern comparisons. I recently read again the posthumous volume of lectures collected under the title of *Form and Style in Poetry*—mostly lecture notes, but Ker always wrote, and must have spoken, well. It is a book from which the poet, as much as the scholar and the general reader, can profit. I think it is worth while, before proceeding to conjectures of my own as to what we mean, or ought to mean, or can mean, when we say that a poem is musical or unmusical, to emphasize the difference between the approach of the scholar and that of the writer of verse.

The poet, when he talks or writes about poetry, has peculiar qualifications and peculiar limitations: if we allow for the latter we can better appreciate the former—a caution which I recommend to poets themselves as well as to the readers of what they say about poetry. I can never re-read any of my own prose writings without acute embarrassment: I shirk the task, and consequently may not take account of all the assertions to which I have at one time or another committed myself; I may often repeat what I have said before, and I may equally well contradict myself. But I believe that the critical writings of poets, of which in the past there have been some very distinguished examples, owe a great deal of their interest to the fact that at the back of the poet's mind, if not as his ostensible purpose, he is always trying to defend the kind of poetry he is writing, or to formulate the kind that he wants to write. Especially when he is young, and actively engaged in battling for the kind of poetry which he practises, he sees the poetry of the past in relation to his own: and his gratitude to those dead poets from whom he has learned, as well as his indifference to those whose aims have been alien to his own, may be exaggerated. He is not so much a judge as an advocate. His knowledge even is likely to be partial: for his studies will have led him to concentrate on certain authors to the neglect of others. When he theorizes about poetic creation, he is likely to be generalizing one type of experience; when he ventures into aesthetics, he is likely to be less, rather than more competent than the philosopher; and he may do best merely to report, for the information of the philosopher, the data of his own introspection. What he writes about poetry, in short, must be assessed in relation to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poetry he writes. We must return to the scholar for ascertainment of facts, and to the more detached critic for impartial judgement. The critic, certainly, should be something of a scholar, and the scholar something of a critic. Ker, whose attention was devoted mainly to the literature of the past, and to problems of historical relationship, must be put in the category of scholars; but he had in a high degree the sense of value, the humane taste, the understanding of critical canons and the ability to apply them, without which the scholar's contribution can be only indirect.

There is another, more particular respect in which the scholar's and the practitioner's acquaintance with versification differ. Here, perhaps, I should be prudent to speak only of myself. I have never been able to retain the names of feet and metres, or to pay the proper respect to the accepted rules of scansion. At school, I enjoyed very much reciting Homer or Virgil—in my own fashion. Perhaps I had some instinctive suspicion that nobody really knew how Greek ought to be pronounced, or what interweaving of Greek and native rhythms the Roman ear might appreciate in Virgil; perhaps I had only an instinct of protective laziness. But certainly, when it came to applying rules of scansion to English verse, with its very different stresses and variable syllabic values, I wanted to know why one line was good and another bad; and this, scansion could not tell me. The only way to learn to manipulate any kind of English verse seemed to be by assimilation and imitation, by becoming so engrossed in the work of a particular poet that one could produce a recognisable derivative. This is not to say that I consider the analytical study of metric, of the abstract forms which sound so extraordinarily different when handled by different poets, to be an utter waste of time. It is only that a study of anatomy will not teach you how to make a hen lay eggs. I do not recommend any other way of beginning the study of Greek or Latin verse than with the aid of those rules of scansion which were established by grammarians after most of the poetry had been written: but if we could revive those languages sufficiently to be able to speak and hear them as the authors did, we could regard the rules with indifference. We have to learn a dead language by an artificial method, and we have to approach its versification by an artificial method, and our methods of teaching have to be applied to pupils most of whom have only a moder-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ate gift for language. Even in approaching the poetry of our own language, we may find the classification of metres, of lines with different numbers of syllables and stresses in different places, useful at a preliminary stage, as a simplified map of a complicated territory: but it is only the study, not of poetry but of poems, that can train our ear. It is not from rules, or by cold-blooded imitation indeed, but by a deeper imitation that is achieved by analysis of style. When we imitated Shelley, it was not so much from a desire to write as he did, as from an invasion of the adolescent self by Shelley, which made Shelley's way, for the time, the only way in which to write.

The practice of English versification has, no doubt, been affected by awareness of the rules of prosody: it is a matter for the historical scholar to determine the influence of Latin upon those great innovators Wyatt and Surrey. The great grammarian Otto Jespersen has maintained that the structure of English grammar has been misunderstood in our attempts to make it conform to the categories of Latin—as in the supposed 'subjunctive'. In the history of versification, the question whether poets have misunderstood the rhythms of the language in imitating foreign models does not arise: we must accept the practices of great poets of the past, because they are practices upon which our ear has been trained and must be trained. I believe that a number of foreign influences have gone to enrich the range and variety of English verse. Some classical scholars hold the view—this is a matter beyond my competence—that the native measure of Latin poetry was accentual rather than syllabic, that it was overlaid by the influence of a very different language—Greek—and that it reverted to something approximating to its early form, in poems such as the *Pervigilium Veneris* and the Christian hymns. If so, I cannot help suspecting that to the cultivated audience of the age of Virgil, part of the pleasure in the poetry arose from the presence in it of two metrical schemes in a kind of counterpoint: even though the audience may not necessarily have been able to analyse the experience. Similarly, it may be possible that the beauty of some English poetry is due to the presence of more than one metrical structure in it. Deliberate attempts to devise English metres on Latin models are usually very frigid. Among the most successful are a few exercises by Campion, in his brief but too

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

little read treatise on metrics; among the most eminent failures, in my opinion, are the experiments of Robert Bridges—I would give all his ingenious inventions for his earlier and more traditional lyrics. But when a poet has so thoroughly absorbed Latin poetry that its movement informs his verse without deliberate artifice—as with Milton and in some of Tennyson's poems—the result can be among the great triumphs of English versification.

What I think we have, in English poetry, is a kind of amalgam of systems of divers sources (though I do not like to use the word 'system', for it has a suggestion of conscious invention rather than growth): an amalgam like the amalgam of races, and indeed partly due to racial origins. The rhythms of Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Norman French, of Middle English and Scots, have all made their mark upon English poetry, together with the rhythms of Latin, and, at various periods, of French, Italian and Spanish. As with human beings in a composite race, different strains may be dominant in different individuals, even in members of the same family, so one or another element in the poetic compound may be more congenial to one or another poet or to one or another period. The kind of poetry we get is determined, from time to time, by the influence of one or another contemporary literature in a foreign language; or by circumstances which make one period of our own past more sympathetic than another; or by the prevailing emphases in education. But there is one law of nature more powerful than any of these varying currents, or influences from abroad or from the past: the law that poetry must not stray too far from the ordinary everyday language which we use and hear. Whether poetry is accentual or syllabic, rhymed or rhymeless, formal or free, it cannot afford to lose its contact with the changing language of common intercourse.

It may appear strange, that when I profess to be talking about the 'music' of poetry, I put such emphasis upon conversation. But I would remind you, first, that the music of poetry is not something which exists apart from the meaning. Otherwise, we could have poetry of great musical beauty which made no sense, and I have never come across such poetry. The apparent exceptions only show a difference of degree: there are poems in which we are moved by the music and take the sense for granted, just as there are poems in which we attend to the sense and are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moved by the music without noticing it. Take an apparently extreme example—the nonsense verse of Edward Lear. His nonsense is not vacuity of sense: it is a parody of sense, and that is the sense of it. *The Jumblies* is a poem of adventure, and of nostalgia for the romance of foreign voyage and exploration; *The Yongy-Bongy-Bo* and *The Dong with a Luminous Nose* are poems of unrequited passion—'blues' in fact. We enjoy the music, which is of a high order, and we enjoy the feeling of irresponsibility towards the sense. Or take a poem of another type, the *Blue Closet* of William Morris. It is a delightful poem, though I cannot explain what it means and I doubt whether the author could have explained it. It has an effect somewhat like that of a rune or charm, but runes and charms are very practical formulae designed to produce definite results, such as getting a cow out of a bog. But its obvious intention (and I think the author succeeds) is to produce the effect of a dream. It is not necessary, in order to enjoy the poem, to know what the dream means; but human beings have an unshakable belief that dreams mean something: they used to believe—and many still believe—that dreams disclose the secrets of the future; the orthodox modern faith is that they reveal the secrets—or at least the more horrid ones—of the past. It is a commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may wholly escape paraphrase. It is not quite so commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may be something larger than its author's conscious purpose, and something remote from its origins. One of the most obscure of modern poets was the French writer Stephane Mallarmé, of whom the French sometimes say that his language is so peculiar that it can be understood only by foreigners. The late Roger Fry, and his friend Charles Mauron, published an English translation with notes to unriddle the meanings: when I learn that a difficult sonnet was inspired by seeing a painting on the ceiling reflected on the polished top of a table, or by seeing the light reflected from the foam on a glass of beer, I can only say that this may be a correct embryology, but it is not the meaning. If we are moved by a poem, it has meant something, perhaps something important, to us; if we are not moved, then it is, as poetry, meaningless. We can be deeply stirred by hearing the recitation of a poem in a language of which we understand no word; but if we are then told that the poem is gibberish

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and has no meaning, we shall consider that we have been deluded —this was no poem, it was merely an imitation of instrumental music. If, as we are aware, only a part of the meaning can be conveyed by paraphrase, that is because the poet is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist. A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant. For instance, the author may have been writing some peculiar personal experience, which he saw quite unrelated to anything outside; yet for the reader the poem may become the expression of a general situation, as well as of some private experience of his own. The reader's interpretation may differ from the author's and be equally valid—it may even be better. There may be much more in a poem than the author was aware of. The different interpretations may all be partial formulations of one thing; the ambiguities may be due to the fact that the poem means more, not less, than ordinary speech can communicate.

So, while poetry attempts to convey something beyond what can be conveyed in prose rhythms, it remains, all the same, one person talking to another; and this is just as true if you sing it, for singing is another way of talking. The immediacy of poetry to conversation is not a matter on which we can lay down exact laws. Every revolution in poetry is apt to be, and sometimes to announce itself as, a return to common speech. That is the revolution which Wordsworth announced in his prefaces, and he was right: but the same revolution had been carried out a century before by Oldham, Waller, Denham and Dryden; and the same revolution was due again something over a century later. The followers of a revolution develop the new poetic idiom in one direction or another; they polish or perfect it; meanwhile the spoken language goes on changing, and the poetic idiom goes out of date. Perhaps we do not realise how natural the speech of Dryden must have sounded to the most sensitive of his contemporaries. No poetry, of course, is ever exactly the same speech that the poet talks and hears: but it has to be in such a relation to the speech of his time that the listener or reader can say 'that is how I should talk if I could talk poetry.' This is the reason why the best contemporary can give us a feeling of excitement

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and a sense of fulfilment different from any sentiment aroused by even very much greater poetry of a past age.

The music of poetry, then, must be a music latent in the common speech of its time. And that means also that it must be latent in the common speech of the poet's *place*. It would not be to my present purpose to inveigh against the ubiquity of standardised, or 'B.B.C.' English. If we all came to talk alike there would no longer be any point in our not writing alike: but until that time comes—and I hope it may be long postponed—it is the poet's business to use the speech which he finds about him, that with which he is most familiar. I shall always remember the impression of W. B. Yeats reading poetry aloud. To hear him read his own works was to be made to recognise how much the Irish way of speech is needed to bring out the beauties of Irish poetry: to hear Yeats reading William Blake was an experience of a different kind, more astonishing than satisfying. Of course, we do not want the poet merely to reproduce exactly the conversational idiom of himself, his family, his friends and his particular district: but what he finds there is the material out of which he must make his poetry. He must, like the sculptor, be faithful to the material in which he works; it is out of sounds that he has heard that he must make his melody and harmony.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that all poetry ought to be melodious, or that melody is more than one of the components of the music of words. Some poetry is meant to be sung; most poetry, in modern times, is meant to be spoken—and there are many other things to be spoken of besides the murmur of innumerable bees or the moan of doves in immemorial elms. Dissonance, even cacophany, has its place: just as, in a poem of any length, there must be transitions between passages of greater and less intensity, to give rhythm of fluctuating emotion essential to the musical structure of the whole; and the passages of less intensity will be, in relation to the level on which the total poem operates, prosaic—so that, in the sense implied by that context, it may be said that no poet can write a poem of amplitude unless he is a master of the prosaic.[1]

[1]This is the complementary doctrine to that of the 'touchstone' line or passage of Matthew Arnold: this test of the greatness of a poet is the way he writes his less intense, but structurally vital, matter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What matters, in short, is the whole poem: and if the whole poem need not be, and often should not be, wholly melodious, it follows that a poem is not made only out of 'beautiful words.' I doubt whether, from the point of view of *sound* alone, any word is more or less beautiful than another—within its own language, for the question whether some languages are not more beautiful than others is quite another question. The ugly words are the words not fitted for the company in which they find themselves; there are words which are ugly because of rawness or because of antiquation; there are words which are ugly because of foreignness or ill-breeding (e.g. *television*): but I do not believe that any word well-established in its own language is either beautiful or ugly. The music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all the other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association. Not all words, obviously, are equally rich and well-connected: it is part of the business of the poet to dispose the richer among the poorer, at the right points, and we cannot afford to load a poem too heavily with the former—for it is only at certain moments that a word can be made to insinuate the whole history of a language and a civilisation. This is an 'allusiveness' which is not the fashion or eccentricity of a peculiar type of poetry; but an allusiveness which is in the nature of words, and which is equally the concern of every kind of poet. My purpose here is to insist that a 'musical poem' is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the words which compose it, and that these two patterns are indissoluble and one. And if you object that it is only the pure sound, apart from the sense, to which the adjective 'musical' can be rightly applied, I can only reaffirm my previous assertion that the sound of a poem is as much an abstraction from the poem as is the sense.

The history of blank verse illustrates two interesting and related points: the dependence upon speech and the striking difference, in what is prosodically the same form, between dramatic blank verse and blank verse employed for epical, philosophical, meditative and idyllic purposes. The dependence of verse upon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

speech is much more direct in dramatic poetry than in any other. In most kinds of poetry, the necessity for its reminding us of contemporary speech is reduced by the latitude allowed for personal idiosyncrasy: a poem by Gerard Hopkins, for instance, may sound pretty remote from the way in which you and I express ourselves—or rather, from the way in which our fathers and grandfathers expressed themselves: but Hopkins does give the impression that his poetry has the necessary fidelity to his way of thinking and talking to himself. But in dramatic verse the poet is speaking in one character after another, through the medium of a company of actors trained by a producer, and of different actors and different producers at different times: his idiom must be comprehensive of all the voices, but present at a deeper level than is necessary when the poet speaks only for himself. Some of Shakespeare's later verse is very elaborate and peculiar: but it remains the language, not of one person, but of a world of persons. It is based upon the speech of three hundred years ago, yet when we hear it well rendered we can forget the distance of time—as is brought home to us most patently in one of those plays, of which *Hamlet* is the chief, which can fittingly be produced in modern dress. By the time of Otway dramatic blank verse has become artificial and at best reminiscent; and when we get to the verse plays by nineteenth century poets, of which the greatest is probably *The Cenci*, it is difficult to preserve any illusion of reality. Nearly all the greater poets of the last century tried their hands at verse plays. These plays, which few people read more than once, are treated with respect as fine poetry; and their insipidity is usually attributed to the fact that the authors, though great poets, were amateurs in the theatre. But even if the poets had had greater natural gifts for the theatre, or had toiled to acquire the craft, their plays would have been just as ineffective, unless their theatrical talent and experience had shown them the necessity for a different kind of versification. It is not primarily lack of plot, or lack of action and suspense, or imperfect realization of character, or lack of anything of what is called 'theatre,' that makes these plays so lifeless: it is primarily that their rhythm of speech is something that we cannot associate with any human being except a poetry reciter.

Even under the powerful manipulation of Dryden dramatic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blank verse shows a grave deterioration. There are splendid passages in *All for Love*: yet Dryden's characters talk more naturally at times in the heroic plays which he wrote in rhymed couplets, than they do in what would seem the more natural form of blank verse—though less naturally in English than the characters of Corneille and Racine in French. The causes for the rise and decline of any form of art are always complex, and we can always trace a number of contributory causes, while there seems to remain some deeper cause incapable of formulation: I should not care to advance any one reason why prose came to supersede verse in the theatre. But I feel sure that one reason why blank verse cannot be employed now in the drama is that so much non-dramatic poetry, and great non-dramatic poetry, has been written in it in the last three hundred years. Our minds are saturated in these non-dramatic works in what is formally the same kind of verse. If we can imagine, as a flight of fancy, Milton coming before Shakespeare, Shakespeare would have had to discover quite a different medium from that which he used and perfected. Milton handled blank verse in a way which no one has ever approached or ever will approach: and in so doing did more than anyone or anything else to make it impossible for the drama: though we may also believe that dramatic blank verse had exhausted its resources, and had no future in any event. Indeed, Milton almost made blank verse impossible for any purpose for a couple of generations. It was the precursors of Wordsworth — Thomson, Young, Cowper—who made the first efforts to rescue it from the degradation to which the eighteenth-century imitators of Milton had reduced it. There is much, and varied, fine blank verse in the nineteenth century: the nearest to colloquial speech is that of Browning—but, significantly, in his monologues rather than in his plays.

To make a generalization like this is not to imply any judgement of the relative stature of poets. It merely calls attention to the profound difference between dramatic and all other kinds of verse: a difference in the music, which is a difference in the relation to the current spoken language. It leads to my next point: which is that the task of the poet will differ, not only according to his personal constitution, but according to the period in which he finds himself. At some periods, the task is to explore the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

musical possibilities of an established convention of the relation of the idiom of verse to that of speech; at other periods, the task is to catch up with the changes in colloquial speech, which are fundamentally changes in thought and sensibility. This cyclical movement also has a very great influence upon our critical judgement. At a time like ours, when a refreshment of poetic diction similar to that brought about by Wordsworth has been called for (whether it has been satisfactorily accomplished or not) we are inclined, in our judgements upon the past, to exaggerate the importance of the innovators at the expense of the reputation of the developers: which might account for what will seem, surely, to a later age, our undue adulation of Donne and depreciation of Milton.

I have said enough, I think, to make clear that I do not believe that the task of the poet is primarily and always to effect a revolution in language. It would not be desirable, even if it were possible, to live in a state of perpetual revolution: the craving for continual novelty of diction and metric is as unwholesome as the obstinate adherence to the idiom of our grandfathers. There are times for exploration and times for the development of the territory acquired. The poet who did most for the English language is Shakespeare: and he carried out, in one short lifetime, the task of two poets. I have attempted to indicate his dual achievement elsewhere: I can only say here, briefly, that the development of Shakespeare's verse can be roughly divided into two periods. During the first, he was slowly adapting his form to colloquial speech: so that by the time he wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* he had devised a medium in which everything that any dramatic character might have to say, whether high or low, 'poetical' or 'prosaic,' could be said with naturalness and beauty. Having got to this point, he began to elaborate. The first period—of the poet who began with *Venus and Adonis,* but who had already, in *Love's Labour's Lost,* begun to see what he had to do—is from artificiality to simplicity, from stiffness to suppleness. The later plays move from simplicity towards elaboration. He is occupied with the other task of the poet—doing the work of two poets in one lifetime —that of experimenting to see how elaborate, how complicated, the music could be made without losing touch with colloquial speech altogether, and without his characters ceasing to be human

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beings. This is the poet of *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Pericles*, and *The Tempest*. Of those whose exploration took them in this one direction only, Milton is the greatest master. We may think that Milton, in exploring the orchestral music of language, sometimes ceases to talk a social idiom at all; we may think that Wordsworth, in attempting to recover the social idiom, sometimes oversteps the mark and becomes pedestrian: but it is often true that only by going too far can we find out how far we can go; though one has to be a very great poet to justify such perilous adventures.

So far, I have spoken only of versification and not of poetic structure; and it is time for a reminder that the music of verse is not a line by line matter, but a question of the whole poem. Only with this in mind can we approach the vexed question of formal pattern and free verse. In the plays of Shakespeare a musical design can be discovered in particular scenes, and in his more perfect plays as wholes. It is a music of imagery as well as sound: Mr. Wilson Knight has shown in his examination of several of the plays, how much the use of recurrent imagery, and dominant imagery, throughout one play, has to do with the total effect. A play of Shakespeare is a very complex musical structure; the more easily grasped structure is that of forms such as the sonnet, the formal ode, the ballade, the villanelle, rondeau or sestina. It is sometimes assumed that modern poetry has done away with forms like these. I have seen signs of a return to them; and indeed I believe that the tendency to return to set, and even elaborate patterns is permanent, as permanent as the need for a refrain or a chorus to a popular song. Some forms are more appropriate to some languages than to others, and all are more appropriate to some periods than to others. At one stage the stanza is a right and natural formalization of speech into pattern. But the stanza —and the more elaborate it is, the more rules to be observed in its proper execution, the more surely this happens — tends to become fixed to the idiom of the moment of its perfection. It quickly loses contact with the changing colloquial speech, being possessed by the mental outlook of a past generation; it becomes discredited when employed solely by those writers who, having no impulse to form within them, have recourse to pouring their liquid sentiment into a ready-made mould in which they vainly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hope that it will set. In a perfect sonnet, what you admire is not so much the author's skill in adapting himself to the pattern as the skill and power with which he makes the pattern comply with what he has to say. Without this fitness, which is contingent upon period as well as individual genius, the rest is at best virtuosity: and where the musical element is the only element, that also vanishes. Elaborate forms return: but there have to be periods during which they are laid aside.

As for 'free verse,' I expressed my view twenty-five years ago by saying that no verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job. No one has better cause to know than I, that a great deal of bad prose has been written under the name of free verse: though whether its authors wrote bad prose or bad verse, or bad verse in one style or in another, seems to me a matter of indifference. But only a bad poet could welcome free verse as a liberation from form. It was a revolt against dead form, and a preparation for new form or for renewal of the old; it was an insistence upon the inner unity which is unique to every poem, against the outer unity which is typical. The poem comes before the form, in the sense that a form grows out of the attempt of somebody to say something; just as a system of prosody is only a formulation of the identities in the rhythms of a succession of poets influenced by each other.

Forms have to be broken and remade: but I believe that any language, so long as it remains the same language, imposes its laws and restrictions and permits its own license, dictates its own speech rhythms and sound patterns. And a language is always changing; its developments in vocabulary, in syntax, pronunciation and intonation—even, in the long run, its deterioration—must be accepted by the poet and made the best of. He in turn has the privilege of contributing to the development and maintaining the quality, the capacity of the language to express a wide range, and subtle gradation, of feeling and emotion; his task is both to respond to change and make it conscious, and to battle against degradation below the standards which he has learnt from the past. The liberties that he may take are for the sake of order.

At what stage contemporary verse now finds itself, I must leave you to judge for yourselves. I suppose that it will be agreed that if the work of the last twenty years is worthy of being classi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fied at all, it is as belonging to a period of search for a proper modern colloquial idiom. We have still a good way to go in the invention of a verse medium for the theatre; a medium in which we shall be able to hear the speech of contemporary human beings, in which dramatic characters can express the purest poetry without high-falutin and in which they can convey the most commonplace message without absurdity. But when we reach a point at which the poetic idiom can be stabilised, then a period of musical elaboration can follow. I think that a poet may gain much from the study of music: how much technical knowledge of musical form is desirable I do not know, for I have not that technical knowledge myself. But I believe that the properties in which music concerns the poet most nearly, are the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure. I think that it might be possible for a poet to work too closely to musical analogies: the result might be an effect of artificiality; but I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realise itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image; and I do not believe that this is an experience peculiar to myself. The use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music. There are possibilities for verse which bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or a quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject-matter. It is in the concert room, rather than in the opera house, that the germ of a poem may be quickened. More than this I cannot say, but must leave the matter here to those who have had a musical education. But I would remind you again of the two tasks of poetry, the two directions in which language must at different times be worked: so that however far it may go in musical elaboration, we must expect a time to come when poetry will have again to be recalled to speech. The same problems arise, and always in new forms; and poetry has always before it, as F. S. Oliver said of politics, an 'endless adventure.'

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ellen Terhune

Edmund Wilson

I

I ALWAYS FELT, when I went to the Terhune house, that I was getting back into the past—or rather, perhaps, that an atmosphere which had first been established at the beginning of the eighties, when the house in which she lived had been built, had been preserved there as a vital medium down into the nineteen twenties. Most of the places in Hecate County seemed either newer or older —modern households or old-fashioned farms; but the moment I entered the gate in the high green picket-fence, which was matted with honeysuckle in summer, and caught sight of the white obelisk of the windmill, dismantled though it was of its sails, towering behind the trees, I felt that I had come back into something which had definitely vanished with the War but which was perfectly familiar from my childhood.

There was a drive, always covered with gravel, that swept around in a beautiful curve and brought you up under a big porte-cochère, which reminded you of horses with fly-nets, and shiny and black closed carriages; and the house, which was yellow and covered with shingles that overlapped with rounded ends like scales, was an impressive though rather formless mass of cupolas with fool's-cap tops, dormers with diamond panes, balconies with little white railings, and porches with Ionian columns, all pointing in different directions. It had been built or bought by Ellen Terhune's grandfather, a brilliant and highly successful doctor. Dr. Bristead, even in that period when doctors were more "humanistic" and had wider interests than now, had been a man of remarkable cultivation, and the house was richly lined with the evidences of his pastimes, his studies and his travels. One saw, among many other things in the downstairs rooms, signed photographs of or framed letters from Theodore Roosevelt, Kipling, Pierre Loti, Mark Twain, Adelina Patti, Paderewski, Mechnikov and Pasteur, all of whom had been patients or correspondents of his; a statue of Hebe

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by Canova, a couple of Corots and a Sisley; a hookah, which Ellen told me he had sometimes used to smoke; a group of Chinese gongs, with which dinner was still announced; a regal set of carved ivory chessmen, brought back from a trip to the Orient, which had elephants instead of bishops; an Australian bushman's boomerang; a Stradivarius and an eighteenth-century clavichord.

The Bristeads had been especially musical. The doctor had mastered several instruments; and he had organized a family trio in which he had played the cello, his daughter the violin and Mrs. Bristead the piano. Later, when the doctor's wife had died and his daughter had come with Ellen to live with them, they had had the trio again, with Ellen, at the age of twelve, taking over the cello. When her mother had died a few years later and she was living there alone with her grandfather, they had played an immense amount of music; they had gone right through Beethoven and Brahms, whom her grandfather had ended by detesting; had then escaped backward into the eighteenth century, with Ellen's learning Boccherini's cello sonatas and the doctor's getting special transcriptions made of Pergolesi's trios for violins and bass; and had from there, in obedience to one of Dr. Bristead's peculiarly indomitable manias, gone right back through the history of music. Ellen had been obliged to retrace the elegance and restraint of Corelli at an age when she told me she would very much rather have been pounding Schubert and Schumann on the piano; and the doctor had had a small organ installed and relentlessly insisted on their deciphering the intricate masses of Palestrina, thence exploring mediæval motets, troubadour songs and Gregorian chants, and, finally experimenting with ancient Greek modes.

Ellen had thus had the advantage of an exceptional musical training, and she had begun to compose early. By the time she got out of the Conservatoire, where she had started in at eighteen, she was producing work of real merit. She had been influenced in Paris by Debussy; but, working with the whole-tone scale, she had developed an impressionism distinctly her own. She was, in fact, probably the first woman composer who had ever contributed to music anything of authentic value. It is strange that, though women have excelled as novelists and lyric poets, and though there are a few women painters of interest, there should be no important music by women. That is, unless Ellen Terhune is an exception,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and I have always thought her work first-rate, though it somehow seems incommensurable with masculine work of even the same school. It would be foolish to compare her with Chaminade, with whom she has nothing in common; but, on the other hand, even Ravel and Debussy were builders on a bigger scale than Ellen. Her talent in the best of her work, her songs and piano pieces, is as personal as Georgia O'Keefe's pictures or Marianne Moore's poems: a woman's sharp and ready reactions to people and things encountered and a woman's emotions of quick challenge, of a kind of dark resigned despair or of a clear and rapt exaltation.

I called on Ellen one afternoon in the summer of 1926. It was August and I had assumed she was in Maine, where she usually went at that time of year; but I ran into her one day at the post office and she asked me to come to see her. I was delighted, because I always liked to talk to her—her comment on the musical world was wonderful—and, though some considered her arrogant and forbidding, I found her personality sympathetic. It would be especially a relief to get away from the Hecate County summer life, which had involved a great many parties with people who were only made tolerable by summer sports and drinking. I went to see her that same afternoon.

But I found her much disturbed and distressed. She had three highballs in rapid succession, which I had never known her to do before, and which made me a little disappointed, as it associated her to my mind with the summer people, great publishers of their emotions over drinks, so that her house seemed less the haven I had hoped for.

It turned out that Ellen like everyone else was going through a domestic crisis. She had married a man somewhat younger than herself, the conductor Sigismund Soblianski. He had genuinely admired her abilities, had done more perhaps than anyone else to have her work performed; and he had profoundly respected her character as only the matriarchal Jew can respect the austerity of a woman who is set firmly on her own moral base; but the fact that she was also an artist—she had married too late to have children, which might have done something to fuse them—had stimulated a fatal competition. Sigismund, before he married, had worked rather seriously at composing, but Ellen was so much better than he was, that he must have become ashamed of his productions, for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he ceased to write anything at all. Instead, he had begun to develop a hair-raising professional exhibitionism. A brilliant and resourceful musician with a special gift for dramatizing effects, he had gradually come to abandon the playing of new or native music, which, partly at the instance of Ellen, he had originally attempted to encourage, and to go in for great quantities of Chaikovsky and Strauss, Sibelius, Beethoven and Wagner, overcoloring and overacting, and posing to a public who adored him while the serious magicians gave him up.

It was a long time, however, since Ellen and he had seemed to be living together—though I did still run into him sometimes in the country. He had always had his rehearsals in town and Ellen did not like the city; and he had had during the last two or three years a whole series of love affairs which everybody knew about and which Ellen appeared to accept. He had even adopted the practice of bringing out his protegée of the moment—serious-minded little Russian dancer or black-eyed Hungarian violinist—to spend the day with Ellen; but this, though she took it coolly, I am sure Ellen did not like. The truth was, I always thought, that they were still much involved with one another, and that Sigismund did such things in a kind of defiance of Ellen for making him feel second-rate.

But he now, she told me, wanted a divorce: he wanted to get married again. And I could see that Ellen was profoundly upset—though she ascribed her reluctance to the fear that he was making a fool of himself. The woman that he proposed to marry was a much and long publicized actress, and Ellen was inclined to believe that Sigismund's interest in her was merely a part of his own self-publicizing. Frances Fielding was one of those figures who took the place, during the twenties and thirties, of the old-fashioned male matinée idol. She was adored by a following mainly feminine, and she was supposed not to care much about men. But in her pictures and plays she was invariably subdued, at the end of much high-spirited rebellion, by a stubborn and combative lover; and it was obvious that there would be for the public a wonderful double story about Frances' at last meeting her fate at the same time that Sigismund Soblianski had found a creature as dashing as himself. It was particularly disturbing to Ellen, who had tolerated the little protegées, because she herself was the type of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

independent "career women" of an earlier generation and was in some sense losing to a competitor.

"I always thought she was hard as nails," she said, "but she does have a certain—shall I say, style and brilliance?—I can't bear to call it glamor. They're both what the Russians call 'fire-birds,' I suppose—they like to show their plumage in an atmosphere of bright lights and admiration. They're only able really to express themselves by creating for themselves characters that are two-thirds fictitious. And I don't shine in that way.—I'm naturally quiet and drab. I can't bear to go to night-clubs and places, and I long ago ceased to enjoy staying up all night over musical suppers where people get intoxicated and take off Chaliapin and play Viennese waltzes. I'd rather be home in bed reading. I don't like to travel the way Sigismund does, and I hate triumphant tours. I'd rather stay right here with my house and my piano and my furniture and my settled habits. Sigismund is younger than I am and he's temperamentally quite different. I suppose I was always a wet blanket on him, and I can't blame him if he wants somebody gayer. Only I'd like him to have somebody who would be good for him. I can't imagine she really cares about him. I'm afraid he'll end up in Hollywood."

She was, of course, not really drab, but there *was* something in her that didn't give. As I looked around the room, I reflected that, though Sigismund had spent much of his time here during the early years of their marriage, though the house had been supposed to be *their* house, he had left little or no imprint upon it. Dr. Bristead and his daughter and Ellen—both Ellen and her mother were only children—had assembled the things in that room. The low couch on which I was sitting was comfortable but there was something rather stale about it. It had been ministering for too many years to the comfort of too much the same people; the upholstery and the cushions had become almost as personal as a bed, and the pattern of flowers was faded. The effect of the whole room, in fact, seemed somehow a little tinged by the yellow of the discoloring photographs; and, though there were peonies, white and crimson, and gladiolas, orange-pink, and beautiful old cabinets and tip-top tables, the room had never quite been purged of the bad taste of preceding generations; and the delicate crepuscular Corots were thrown into further shadow by larger canvasses, also

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

French, of picturesque Moorish scenes that made patches of rather messy color. Still there was something about it I liked, and I was glad it had remained the same.

And now Ellen was telling me about her girlhood. She had been terribly homely, she said, and she had always had an awful time at dances: she always knew that if a boy asked her to dance, it was only because his mother had made him. "I was a sight," she said. "I had crooked teeth and my head was too big for my body. Even Mother was discouraged about me." She was certainly not bad-looking now and she could never have been so homely as she imagined; but she was short and did have rather a large square head on a neck that was a little too small for it—physically, she resembled the doctor—and I could see that, with her precocious intelligence, she might not have been a belle at dances. But her magnificent agate-green eyes must at any age have been arresting: they seemed to concentrate the light of the intellect as a powerful lens does the sun, and in this intellectual character they suggested the eyes of a remarkable man; yet they were also extremely feminine and responded to everything that met them as the eyes of men seldom do. The rest of Ellen's face was neither so striking nor so mobile: her mouth was small and her nose a little owl-like, and her face with its square jawbones was too broad for them. But the effect of her eyes was mesmeric.

She involved you in her concentration, and as she went on describing her childhood, I was forced to see it all as she did. Her parents should never have married, she said—though I tried to point out that it was silly to imply that she should never have existed. They had never had anything in common. Her father, before his marriage, had been a man about town and a sportsman —she showed me a photograph with a handsome mustache, hair amiably parted in the middle, and some kind of small chrysanthemum in the buttonhole. He had done a great deal of drinking, and they had belonged, in the first years of their marriage, to a rich and rather fast set. He had had no intellectual or artistic tastes, and for her mother, brought up by Dr. Bristead, this life must have been deeply uncongenial, even, she thought, disgusting. Ellen's father, a Wall Street man with a seat on the Stock Exchange, had been ruined, the year before Ellen was born, by the crash of 1884; and after that he had always done badly. They had gone to live

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with Ellen's grandfather, and her father was always in town. Sometimes he was brought home in very bad shape—which she gradually learned was due to drinking—and had to stay in bed for weeks. He had killed himself when Ellen was eleven in a cheap little New York hotel of which he had been ashamed to let her mother know the address.

Those tragedies of the turn of the century! I thought; it was one thing to die or be broken for a political ideal or a social order as had happened to both Southerners and Northerners in the years of the Civil War; but to die, to be crushed, to be shattered, through the overpowering progress of big business, through the unrestrained greed of speculation, seemed hard on those men and women whom we remember as gentle and bright and who look at us, in such photographs as those which Ellen produced from a drawer, with the American friendliness and candor.

She could hardly remember anything amiable in the relations between her father and mother. Her mother had studied violin and had wanted a professional career; her marrying Ellen's father had put an end to this, and she had never forgiven him for it. She would complain that she had given up her music and then been left without resources for the social life in which he had involved her. "She might have had," said Ellen, "a quite different life. Technically, she was very good. I don't think she was meant for marriage." They had used to have long dreadful controlled quarrels, which Ellen would sometimes overhear: her mother's cold voice would go on and on, pretending to appeal to him in a reasonable way—What was she to think? What was she to expect? when he didn't keep his promises or use ordinary judgment, etc. He would be sorry, try to reassure her about his conduct and prospects for the future. It was heartbreaking, Ellen said: though not at all intellectual, he had really been a lovable man, and he had a sort of distinction of feeling quite different from her mother's emphatic dignity. After he had lost his money, he would never borrow from friends—though there were plenty who would have been glad to help him. But he had never had to work before, and he had never in his career as a ladies' man been up against anyone like Ellen's mother. "It must have been wretched beyond words," she said. "You say that I ought to be glad I came out of it—but, even assuming that I'm worth anything, how does that make it better for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mother and Father, who died without getting what they wanted themselves when I was still an ugly little girl?"

"They must have been happier than you think," I said. "All married people have those conversations, and then they go to bed and forget it."—"There was something about Mother that chilled people,"—she went on, disregarding my attempt to be helpful and forcing me to follow her vision of the unrelieved hopelessness of her parents' situation.—"She was sensitive on her musical side, but I suppose what she presented to Father was a surface of solid whalebone.—And I do the same thing!—I know it. I chill people and put them in the wrong. That's what I did with Sigismund. He always said I made him feel guilty. But it's really because *I* always feel guilty. Mother made *me* feel guilty, too. I feel that I oughtn't to make claims on people, that I oughtn't to expect them to care about me. I behave as if I took this for granted, and then I reproach them for neglecting me. I know myself very well!"

"You can't still think you're not goodlooking," I said. "It isn't merely a question of that: Mother had a special and distressing reason for not liking the way I looked. It seems Mother had a terribly bad time when I was born on account of my head's being so big, and I don't think she ever really recovered from it. I suppose it was really what she died of. She used to talk about it sometimes in my presence. She may have thought I didn't understand, but she must have wanted people to pity her for having produced such a little monstrosity, and I think she also wanted me to feel that she had suffered and sacrificed herself for me." She was casual enough in tone; she was not herself laying it on; but, under the compulsion of her serious eyes, I felt the pain of the situation penetrate me and pin me to the spot. "I imagine, though, that she didn't exaggerate," she relentlessly and steadily went on. "I'm not sure I can't remember it myself. I've been subject all my life to peculiar spells where I think that I can't move or do anything.—I get it when I'm nervously exhausted," she explained in reply to my question, "and sometimes in my sleep. It's a perfectly horrible feeling—it's a kind of overpowering inertia that seems all to be located in my head—it's as if I were weighed down by a millstone, as if my head were a great stone ball. I suppose, though, that it's only an intensified form of a tendency I have all the time—I'm really a very inert person. I think my difficulties in getting born

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

may have made it more difficult for me to live. I hate so to move or make serious changes. That's one reason I'm so tiresome for Sigismund." "I've always thought of you, Ellen," I said, "as a very dynamic person." "Some of the most dynamic people," she insisted, "can't move at all, you know. They try to make up by a lot of loud talking and rushing around from place to place for their fear that they're really static." "You don't do that," I assured her. "No: I sit like a fire hydrant—that can always be tapped for cold water.—I've been trying to face my immobility lately and to do something with it in music. I've always been a little bit scared by these states that I was telling you about, and I thought it might be a good thing to take hold of them and deliberately exploit them—to try to put them outside myself."

I was afraid that she had been suffering from them lately: there were circles about her eyes, and her face, even for her, seemed pale. I thought the drinks were making her run on in a way that was not characteristic of her and that I probably oughtn't to encourage, and I was glad to shift the conversation from her parents to her artistic problems. "What are you working on now?" I asked. "I've been trying to do a sonata," she said, "just an old-fashioned sonata." I asked her whether any of it were in shape to play. "I've been having rather a struggle with it," she said, "but I'll play you the part I mean." She put out her cigarette, and we went into the next room to the piano.

There were no leaves to turn—she had it in her head—and I sat in a low carved armchair which reminded me vaguely of Abbotsford, and contemplated the curious shape of a seventeenth-century *tromba marina* hung on the opposite wall. This obsolete instrument, which the doctor had acquired and even learned to play, producing, as Ellen had told me, rather creaking and eerie results, looked more like an oar or a cricket-bat than a kind of violin and, lacking the violin's curves, seemed anomalous and ungainly. It seemed to me now all wrong; and so did Ellen's music. This piece, which she said was the second movement, began with a four-note theme that sounded simple and conventional enough, and I was prepared for something genuinely classic; but the theme was not given the development one expects in the sonata form nor did it even fit the kind of variation that one finds in a passacaglia. She did not even retard or speed it up: she simply

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

played it over and over. It was as if she did not know what to do with it, and the listener was constantly subjected to the embarrassment of fearing that the pianist had got stuck like a phonograph that stutters. There was at moments a suggestion of a second theme that seemed to play about the first in a flimsy and trivial manner, but it would fade off in atmospheric chords and leave the field to the original four notes, as boring and inexpressive as ever. It was like a perverse child, compelled to practise on a summer day, and deliberately annoying the household. At the end, the ghost of a second theme limped off and dropped away in irremediable speciousness and impotence, and we were back with the same confounded phrase, which was never satisfactorily resolved, but simply repeated eight times at precisely the same loudness and tempo.

It sounded a little insane; I felt more worried about Ellen than before. I sat constrained, almost scared, when she stopped, and did not know what to say. Of course it was rather remarkable to have carried off this monotony musically—if she had done so, of which I was not very sure; and this was the line that I took with her. I saw that she was vibrating with tension, that the music had excited her in a way which seemed to be almost unbearable for her and was rather embarrassing for me. She was perspiring in the August heat, and I began to perspire, too. "I'm afraid you're not well," I said.

I remembered with uneasiness that she had sometimes been subject to a kind of epileptic seizure, which was preceded by nervous headaches. I had seen her in one of these fits one evening when I had taken her to a concert where a concerto of hers was to be done and where Sigismund had to conduct. She had usually played her own things; but she was not a very accomplished pianist, and on this occasion Sigismund had believed that it would be better to get a pianist who was accustomed to playing with orchestra. This performer had, however, not much liked the piece and had been antagonized by Sigismund's vehement coaching, and, in spite of a house packed with friends and admirers, who gave it the expected ovation, Ellen knew that it had not been right. I do not think, as a matter of fact, that it was one of her good pieces, and I imagine that the dutiful applause made her feel worse about it.

(*Continued on page* 507)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Political Notes

Dwight Macdonald

ROOSEVELT'S CONSERVATIVE WAR

I have seen little comment on an increasingly obvious phenomenon in this war: the de-politicalization of President Roosevelt's conduct of the war. He has not made any inspirational speeches about world democracy for a long time, leaving the field to Wallace and Willkie; his silence on India has been profound. On the home front, he also seems to be in retirement as a political leader. On the three major domestic issues of the last few months—the poll-tax fight in Congress; the successful raid by the farm bloc, with business backing, on the Administration's price-control legislation; and the reactionary new tax bill, which rejects the Treasury's proposals all down the line—Roosevelt had nothing to say publicly. The manpower muddle is steadily growing worse, with Administration leaders contradicting each other (and themselves) daily.* The light vote in the Congressional elections is an index to the apathy of the electorate, and the unexpectedly large gains scored by the Republicans show the dissatisfaction with Roosevelt of those who did vote. A Republican vote was largely a protest vote, since there were no real issues, the Republicans being unable and the Administration unwilling to create any.

The man in the street may be coming to realize what is apparently still a mystery to the liberal weeklies: that the New Deal has been dead for a long time. The Roosevelt Administration is not fascistic, or even developing with any speed in that direction: like the Churchill government, it finds its chief mass base in the labor movement; civil liberties have been preserved to a remarkable degree. Nor is it progressive or liberal or reformist, as it was between 1933 and 1936. It is not fighting the totalitarian war many radicals and isolationists expected it to before Pearl Harbor, and it is not fighting the "people's war" Wallace and the liberals are still trying to believe in. It is fighting a *conservative* war, which means (1) an inefficient war (relative to either a fascist or a socialist war regime), and thus a bloody, lengthy and exhausting struggle; and (2) a lack of inspiriting, or even sensible, war aims (from the viewpoint of the common man, that is; monopoly capitalism finds the Roosevelt-Churchill war aims sensible enough). By "conservative" I mean that Roosevelt's policy since 1937 has been to maintain the status quo as much as possible by mediating between existing class and group interests, rather than taking any "line" of his own. Since big business is much the strongest group in our society, and growing stronger as a result of the production demands of the war, this means letting big

* For a detailed and unsparing critique of faulty planning in manpower and war production, see the newly issued *Sixth Interim Report of the Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration* (House Report No. 2589). Obtainable free from Representative John H. Tolan, chairman of the Committee.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

business, and its close allies in the top military bureaucracy, more and more run the war. A certain balance, however, is always kept, so that the more extreme policies of the army-big business group are blocked by Roosevelt, as with his shelving early in the war of the famous "M-Day Plan." The farmers, the middle class, the labor movement are also part of the status quo, after all, and exert their own pressures. But the general drift has been to the right in the country since 1937 and in England since the Churchill-Labor government took power in 1940.

THE WILLKIE ADVENTURE The so to speak natural, organic opposition to the conservative war policies of Churchill and Roosevelt would be expected to come from what the British call the "liblabs" (liberal-labor). But the liblabs in both England and this country have been the most loyal supporters of these policies, and the working class, still the one social group with broad enough interests and a sufficient capacity for organization to lead any movement for revolutionary progressive change, has allowed its leaders to integrate the trade unions into the structure of these conservative governments.*

In the absence of this "organic" opposition, a kind of political vacuum arises, into which rush all kinds of adventurers, hoping to exploit the widespread uneasiness and dissatisfaction with the conservative war policies of Roosevelt-Churchill. England last summer saw the reactionary press lord, Beaverbrook, playing a mysterious game against the Churchill government which involved his papers joining the British Communists in putting on joint demonstrations for a Second Front. Analogous, but even more paradoxical, is the quickening Willkie opposition to Roosevelt's war policy, much the most interesting political tendency in recent months. Like Beaverbrook, Willkie is a Second Front enthusiast and a great admirer of Stalin, but where Beaverbrook's game goes no farther than promoting the Second Front, Willkie's only begins there.

In my article, "The (American) People's Century," last summer, I described the curious kind of liberalistic "neo-imperialist" line developed since 1940 by Willkie and Henry Luce (publisher of *Time, Life, Fortune,* and of Clare Boothe Brokaw Luce). Since then, Willkie has made his Chungking speech, which echoed Wallace's "mankind-is-on-the-march" speech; and he has delivered a "Report to the American People" on his world travels which is much the boldest criticism, from a liberal viewpoint, of Roosevelt's war policies to be expressed by any important American politician. The Luce papers have printed the most sympathetic material on the Indian Congress to appear outside the Trotskyist and

* Our own labor leaders have abdicated even more completely than their British colleagues. It is true that in England the conservatives (Tories) are in power, but they have had to admit labor into their government as a junior partner. Our own conservatives (Republicans) are not in power, but neither is the labor movement, which has not for one moment to date—including the Hillman comedy—been permitted to hold any important position in the war apparatus. Roosevelt has, furthermore, turned the Army and Navy cabinet posts over to Republicans, and put the top production, price and manpower posts into conservative hands.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Socialist press; they have begun to criticise the present Administration and to build up Willkie; and *Life* has published its famous "Open Letter to the People of England" demanding that England make it clear she is not fighting to preserve her Empire.

Until Willkie delivered his report on his trip, one possible explanation for his liberal actions of the past year was that Roosevelt was grooming him either to succeed Hull as Secretary of State or to succeed himself in the White House in 1944. This may have been true, but Willkie's report on his world travels, with its caustic revelations of the inadequacy of American aid to Russia and China, its criticism of "our government's wishy-washy attitude towards the problems of India," its demand for a Pacific Charter, its attack on the State Department's policies and representatives, its denunciation of censorship, and its suggestion that "the whip lash of public opinion" be applied to "men with great power" who "like to live free of criticism," i.e., to Roosevelt—all this means that Willkie has decided his political future lies not in cooperating with Roosevelt but rather in opposing him *from the left*—in fact, in playing the same role vis-a-vis Roosevelt today that Roosevelt himself played before Pearl Harbor vis-a-vis the conservative, business-as-usual isolationists. As a short-range maneuver, Willkie's break was masterly: it put Roosevelt in the comic predicament of either defending his war policies by taking issue, *as a conservative*, with Willkie's liberalistic criticisms, or else of failing to reply to the challenge. He chose the second alternative.

From a longer perspective, the Luce-Willkie adventure is extremely hazardous. They seem to have in mind a postwar world in which the old colonial imperialism will disappear, opening a free field to this country, as the most powerfully industrialized, to exploit the world market by relatively peaceful trading methods such as England used in the first half of the nineteenth century. The rise of independent nations in China, India and the Near East would stimulate the industrialization of those regions and provide rich markets for American goods. The underlying assumption is that there is still a future for liberal capitalism, and that these Asiatic revolutions can be contained within bourgeois limits, so that the rise of bourgeois national states in Europe in the last century will be paralleled in this century by a cycle of Asiatic bourgeois national revolutions, and with the same invigorating effects on the world market.

The difficulty, if not the impossibility, of this program today is shown in the explosive nature of the materials Luce-Willkie must use to build their new world. They understand that the first step is the breaking of the British stranglehold on India, so that the native bourgeoisie behind Gandhi can begin to develop that country's rich resources. They also understand that Chiang Kai Chek is their man in China. But the masses who follow Gandhi and the socialistic Nehru may just as easily flow in a collectivist direction, once British rule is shattered, as in a bourgeois one; and the Chinese Communists have shown at least as great a capacity

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for growth as has Chiang's dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.* A revolution today, as Roosevelt and Churchill realize, is likely to take much more drastic forms, whether for good or ill, than Willkie reckons on. If it were just a question of the United States and the Eastern nations, the development Willkie and Luce hope for might be theoretically possible. But there are also Russia, England and the European continent to be considered, decisive areas in which some kind of collectivism, whether socialist or totalitarian, seems the most likely perspective. As Hitler's pre-war exploits on the world market showed, a total economy forces other nations to imitate it or to lose out; and Luce-Willkie and their Republican friends presumably do not intend to lose out.

NAZI ECONOMICS AGAIN

In the last issue, C. Wright Mills and J. R. Stanwell, in reviewing Neumann's *Behemoth* and Sweezy's *The Structure of the Nazi Economy*, argued that these books present data disproving the contention advanced previously in PARTISAN REVIEW by James Burnham and myself that Germany is no longer a capitalist nation, but must be described by some such term as "bureaucratic collectivism." I should like here to submit those books to a more critical scrutiny than Mills and Stanwell did.

The points which Miss Sweezy establishes in her book—with admirable conscientiousness, I agree with Stanwell—neither prove nor disprove that Germany is still capitalist. The Nazis have not extended nationalization because it is more opportune for them to maintain private property *forms* while giving them a non-capitalist *content* through State control; the famous "reprivatization" of former State enterprises took place mostly in 1936 and later, i.e., after the Nazis had consolidated their grip on the economy, and thus shows precisely this indifference to the formal aspect of property relations. That wages have been held down and that inequalities of income have increased under the Nazis proves that this is an exploitative society, not that it is capitalist. That big business has grown bigger at the expense of little business merely indicates (1) that the war economy can be more efficiently organized that way, and (2) that the big bourgeoisie are the favored allies of the Nazis. That the petty bourgeoisie (artisans, shopkeepers, white collar workers) have been crushed and largely proletarianized, this shows the demagogic nature of Hitler's "middle-class revolution" but not the survival of capitalist rela-

* The same dangers beset Willkie's domestic liberalism. He has spoken out much more boldly for the Negroes, for example, than Roosevelt ever did in his most liberal period. Possibly he recognizes that the South is a colonial area within our own borders, whose population is kept in poverty and whose resources are only partially developed by a comprador native ruling class acting for absentee Northern capital. Freeing the Negro from this imperialistic exploitation is the first step towards relaxing the stifling grip of absentee capital. But the "Negro Question" is at least as explosive today as the "Indian Question," and Willkie's policy is daringly adventuristic here too. Roosevelt cautiously remains silent on both issues, perhaps because he is a more responsible bourgeois politician than Willkie, perhaps simply—a factor always to be taken into account—because he is in office while Willkie is not.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions. That profits, as Miss Sweezy conclusively shows, have risen sharply under the Nazis has only a *formal* significance if the State controls the properties producing them—and the disposal of the profits themselves—as completely as has been the case since 1936.

Neumann's *Behemoth* is much more ambitious than Miss Sweezy's monograph, being, in fact, the most complete and scholarly description of Nazi society that yet exists in English. (Though I think Mills overrates it; to redress the balance, one should read Karl Korsch's review in the current *New Essays.*) "Totalitarian monopoly capitalism" is Neumann's not very enlightening term for the Nazi system, which he describes as "a private capitalistic economy regimented by the totalitarian state." His case for its capitalist nature rests mostly on two contentions (1) that the control of the economy remains with the great trusts and cartels; (2) that labor is still "free" in the sense in which Marx distinguished capitalist free labor from feudal and slave labor.

(1) Neumann shows that the "imposing edifice of German business organization—trusts, cartels, trade associations—has been carried over from Weimar with little change, and that, *within this structure,* private capitalists still run things. But that monopoly capitalism has managed to preserve a considerable degree of autonomy and (unlike other classes) can to some extent defend its interests even against the Nazi State—this is not decisive, for the same could be said of the Army. The real point is what class or group *at the top* makes the general policy decisions which organized business carries out, and it is just at this crucial point that Neumann gives up the fight. "The chief organ of the war economy is Goering," he writes on p. 247, adding that "the two most important agencies of the whole war economy" are the Four Year Plan Office and the Ministry of Economics. These are military-political, not business, agencies, whose personnel consists of State bureaucrats, Party leaders, and military officers. They are headed respectively by Goering and by Funk, also a Party man.*

(2) Neumann agrees with Marx and Weber that "free labor distinguishes capitalism from any previous economic system." His idea of what constitutes the freedom of labor is, however, very limited: "a clear distinction between labor and leisure time, which introduces the element of calculability and predictability into labor relations." (As against the feudal contract which "was a contract of faith, involving the whole

* In 1937 Funk succeeded Dr. Schacht as Economics Minister, and in 1939 he displaced him as President of the Reichsbank. These were significant shifts, since Schacht was the leading spokesman for private business, and yet Neumann barely mentions them. In a book of over 500 pages, Neumann devotes only one brief paragraph to the whole development of Nazi economy from the "Schacht Period" of 1934-5 through the inauguration of the Second Four Year Plan in 1936, and he actually fails even to mention that the business community backed Schacht and was in general opposed to the Plan. It was in the years 1935-7 that the transition from monopoly capitalism to bureaucratic collectivism took place in Germany, and yet Neumann fails even to note the existence of a serious conflict between businesss and the Party in those years. A major weakness of his book is its failure to give any sense of historical development.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

personality of the worker without distinguishing between labor and leisure.") Even granting this definition, it would seem that "calculability" and "predictability" are not very opposite terms for working-class life under Hitler, and that the German worker has his life pretty well organized for him *outside* the factory, in fact that the tendency of the Nazi (as of the Soviet) system is precisely to obliterate the distinction between work and leisure. Propaganda speeches, parades, mass rallies, Strength Through Joy activities, Winter-Aid collections—these bombard him in his off-duty hours; nor does he escape a factory-like discipline when he quits work for his "private" life. But in any case, Neumann's definition seems much too narrow. Labor in Germany is simply forced labor, the wages, hours and working conditions of which are determined by the State and not by any employer-employee relationship. That labor market which Marx saw as the heart of capitalist labor relations has not existed since 1936, and the worker is as firmly attached to his job as the feudal serf was to his lord's estate.* Indeed, Neumann himself, after describing the various State controls over labor, concludes, most confusingly: "We may thus say, briefly, that the worker does not enjoy any freedom."

Why Mills and Stanwell are so triumphant on the basis of these two books I cannot understand. Miss Sweezy's book has no theoretical pretensions, and Dr. Neumann's is confused and contradictory on the theoretical level. Nor do the reviewers shed much light, for all their polemical heat. Stanwell thinks that to say the State in Germany can solve its *capitalist* economic problems quite easily, is to say that "economic laws have been suspended by political edict"—but obviously bureaucratic collectivism has its own economic laws and contradictions which do not yield so easily to political treatment. Mills is under the impression that the proponents of the non-capitalist theory are not aware that free competition has been displaced by monopoly; this is not true, as he can find out by reading pp. 208-212 of my article in P. R. for May-June, 1941.

Nor do they illuminate the basic question: what is capitalism? Stanwell offers no definition at all. Mills sees "private property in the means of production" as the "major institution" of capitalism. But private property was also the basis of the Roman slave economy, and so cannot be the distinguishing mark of the capitalist system. I should say the best brief definition occurs on p. 385 of the last volume of Marx's *Capital*: "The capitalist mode of production is conditioned on production for exchange, commerce on a large scale." I also follow Marx in his view that capitalism is distinguished from all other forms of class societies

* Cf. L. Hamburger's excellent pamphlet, *How Nazi Germany Has Mobilized and Controlled Labor* (Brookings Institution, 1940). "The *colonus* of the later Roman empire," writes Hamburger, "the *serf* of the Middle Ages, was considered part of the estate of his squire or lord. He was attached to, fixed on, the estate; he had no right to move away. He was, in the language of feudal law, *glebae adscriptus*. Similarly the German worker was now becoming attached to, fixed on, his job—*glebae adscriptus*, if it happened to be an agricultural one, or *factoriae adscriptus* (if one may say so) if it happened to be an industrial one."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—slavery, feudalism, and, I should now add, the bureaucratic collectivisms of Russia and Germany—by the existence of "free" labor, and the production of commodities, those "queer things" compounded of use-value and exchange-value. (A good non-Marxist definition of capitalism is Charles A. Beard's: "a system of production, involving social relationships, in which the primary object is the gain of profit through exchange.") Production for the market, in a word, seems generally agreed upon as the distinguishing characteristic of capitalism. Perhaps Mills or Stanwell can suggest a better definition.

It is true that at present England and America do not conform to this definition of capitalism (though the distance between them and Germany is still great). The State now controls, formally at least, wages, prices, profits, working conditions; the needs of war and not the demands of the market primarily determine production. The real question, however, is whether the old social classes and institutions which are based on the capitalist market are surviving intact enough to push the economy back on the capitalist track after the war. In both England and America, as I have noted above, conservative governments are in power which base themselves primarily on the trade unions (job market) and big business (commodity market), and which preserve as much as possible the old social structure. In Germany, however, the Nazis have smashed the old bourgeois institutions and have atomized the old social classes. The very completeness of the victory German big business scored over the rest of society when the Nazis took power has led, historically, to its defeat by the Frankenstein monster it called to its aid. By 1936 German big business stood triumphant over the wreckage of the middle class and the proletariat, and yet in the fall of that year it was itself pushed aside by Goering and the Nazi-Army creators of the Second Four Rear Plan.

The capitalist market survived through the period of monopoly capitalism because simultaneously with the rise of monopolies there rose also reformist trade unions and a growing middle class as a counterbalance. This balance has been so completely destroyed in Germany that what—as yet—in this country is simply a temporary "war economy," in Germany is a permanent change so long as the Nazis retain power.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On the Decline of Naturalism

Philip Rahv

QUITE A FEW PROTESTS have been aired in recent years against the sway of the naturalist method in fiction. It is charged that this method treats material in a manner so flat and external as to inhibit the search for value and meaning, and that in any case, whatever its past record, it is now exhausted. Dissimilar as they are, both the work of Franz Kafka and the works of the surrealist school are frequently cited as examples of release from the routines of naturalist realism, from its endless bookkeeping of existence. Supporting this indictment are mostly those writers of the younger group who are devoted to experimentation and who look to symbolism, the fable, and the myth.

The younger writers are stirred by the ambition to create a new type of imaginative prose into which the recognizably real enters as one component rather than as the total substance. They want to break the novel of its objective habits; some want to introduce into it philosophical ideas; others are not so much drawn to expressing ideas as to expressing the motley strivings of the inner self — dreams, visions, and fantasies. Manifestly the failure of the political movement in the literature of the past decade has resulted in a revival of religio-esthetic attitudes. The young men of letters are once again watching their own image in the mirror and listening to inner promptings. Theirs is a program calling for the adoption of techniques of planned derangement as a means of cracking open the certified structure of reality and turning loose its latent energies. And surely one cannot dispose of such a program merely by uncovering the element of mystification in it. For the truth is that the artist of the avant-garde has never hesitated to lay hold of the instruments of mystification when it suited his purpose, especially in an age such as ours, when the life about him belies more and more the rational ideals of the cultural tradition.

It has been remarked that in the long run the issue between naturalism and its opponents resolves itself into a philosophical dispute concerning the nature of reality. Obviously those who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reject naturalism in philosophy will also object to its namesake in literature. But it seems to me that when faced with a problem such as that of naturalist fiction, the critic will do well not to mix in ontological maneuvres. From the standpoint of critical method it is impermissible to replace a concrete literary analysis with arguments derived from some general theory of the real. For it is plainly a case of the critic not being able to afford metaphysical commitments if he is to apply himself without preconceived ideas to the works of art that constitute his material. The art-object is from first to last the one certain datum at his disposal; and in succumbing to metaphysical leanings—either of the spiritualist or materialist variety—he runs the risk of freezing his insights in some kind of ideational schema the relevance of which to the task in hand is hardly more than speculative. The act of critical evaluation is best performed in a state of *ideal aloofness* from abstract systems. Its practitioner is not concerned with making up his mind about the ultimate character of reality but with observing and measuring its actual proportions and combinations within a given form. The presence of the real affects him directly, with an immediate force contingent upon the degree of interest, concreteness, and intensity in the impression of life conveyed by the literary artist. The philosopher can take such impressions or leave them, but luckily the critic has no such choice.

Imaginative writing cannot include fixed and systematic definitions of reality without violating its own existential character. Yet in any imaginative effort that which we mean by the real remains the basic criterion of viability, the crucial test of relevance, even if its specific features can hardly be determined in advance but must be *felt anew* in each given instance. And so far as the medium of fiction is concerned, one cannot but agree with Henry James that it gains its "air of reality"—which he considers to be its "supreme virtue"—through "its immense and exquisite correspondence with life." Note that James's formulation allows both for analogical and realistic techniques of representation. He speaks not of copies or reports or transcripts of life but of relations of equivalence, of a "correspondence" which he identifies with the "illusion of life." The ability to produce this illusion he regards as the storyteller's inalienable gift, "the merit on which all other merits . . . helplessly and submissively

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

depend." This insight is of an elementary nature and scarcely peculiar to James alone, but it seems that its truth has been lost on some of our recent catch-as-catch-can innovators in the writing of fiction.

It is intrinsically from this point of view that one can criticise the imitations of Kafka that have been turning up of late (in the little magazines and in the *New Directions* annuals) as being one-sided and even inept. Perhaps Kafka is too idiosyncratic a genius to serve as a model for others, but still it is easy to see where his imitators go wrong. It is necessary to say to them: To know how to take apart the recognizable world is not enough, is in fact merely a way of letting oneself go and of striving for originality at all costs. But originality of this sort is nothing more than a professional mannerism of the avant-garde. The genuine innovator is always trying to make us actually experience his creative contradictions. He therefore employs means that are subtler and more complex: *at the very same time that he takes the world apart he puts it together again.* For to proceed otherwise is to dissipate rather than alter our sense of reality, to weaken and compromise rather than change in any significant fashion our feeling of relatedness to the world. After all, what impressed us most in Kafka is precisely this power of his to achieve a simultaneity of contrary effects, to fit the known into the unknown, the actual into the mythic and vice versa, to combine within one framework a conscientiously empirical account of the visibly real with a dreamlike and magical dissolution of it. In this paradox lies the pathos of his approach to human existence.

A modern poetess has written that the power of the visible derives from the invisible; but the reverse of this formula is also true. Thus the visible and the invisible might be said to stand to each other in an ironic relation of inner dependence and of mutual skepticism mixed with solicitude. It is a superb form of double-talk; and if we are accustomed to its exclusion from naturalistic writing, it is all the more disappointing to find that the newly-evolved 'fantastic' style of the experimentalists likewise excludes it. But there is another consideration, of a more formal nature. It seems to me a profound error to conceive of reality as merely a species of material that the fiction-writer can either use or dispense with as he sees fit. It is a species of material, of course, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something else besides: it also functions as the *discipline of fiction*, much in the same sense that syllabic structure functions as the discipline of verse. This seeming identity of the formal and substantial means of narrative-prose is due, I think, to the altogether free and open character of the medium, which prevents it from developing such distinctly technical controls as poetry has acquired. Hence even the dream, when told in a story, must partake of some of the qualities of the real.

Whereas the surrealist represents man as immured in dreams, the naturalist represents him in a continuous waking state of prosaic daily living, in effect as never dreaming. But both the surrealist and the naturalist go to extremes in simplifying the human condition. J. M. Synge once said that the artist displays at once the difficulty and the triumph of his art when picturing the dreamer leaning out to reality or the man of real life lifted out of it. "In all the poets," he wrote, and this test is by no means limited to poetry alone, "the greatest have both these elements, that is they are supremely engrossed with life, and yet with the wildness of their fancy they are always passing out of what is simple and plain."

The old egocentric formula, "Man's fate is his character" has been altered by the novelists of the naturalist school to read, "Man's fate is his environment." (Zola, the organizer and champion of the school, drew his ideas from physiology and medicine, but in later years his disciples cast the natural sciences aside in favor of the social sciences.) To the naturalist, human behavior is a function of its social environment; the individual is the live register of its qualities; he exists in it as animals exist in nature.*

* Balzac, to whom naturalism is enormously indebted, explains in his preface to the *Comédie Humaine* that the idea of that work came to him in consequence of a "comparison between the human and animal kingdoms." "Does not society," he asks, "make of man, in accordance with the environment in which he lives and moves, as many different kinds of man as there are different zoological species? . . . There have, therefore, existed and always will exist social species, just as there are zoological species."

Zola argues along the same lines: "All things hang together: it is necessary to start from the determination of inanimate bodies in order to arrive at the determination of living beings; and since savants like Claude Bernard demonstrate now that fixed laws govern the human body, we can easily proclaim . . . the hour in which the laws of thought and passion will be formulated in their turn. A like determination will govern the stones of the roadway and the brain of man. . . . We have experimental chemistry and medicine and physiology, and later on an experimental novel. It is an inevitable evolution." (*The Experimental Novel*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Due to this emphasis the naturalist mode has evolved historically in two main directions. On the one hand it has tended towards passive documentation (milieu-panoramas, local-color stories, reportorial studies of a given region or industry, etc.), and on the other towards the exposure of socio-economic conditions (muck-raking). American fiction of the past decade teems with examples of both tendencies, usually in combination. The work of James T. Farrell, for instance, is mostly a genre-record, the material of which is in its very nature operative in producing social feeling, while such novels as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Native Son* are "exposé"-literature, as is the greater part of the fiction of social protest. Dos Passos' triology, *U. S. A.*, is thoroughly political in intention but has the tone and gloss of the methodical genre-painter in the page by page texture of its prose.

I know of no hard and fast rules that can be used to distinguish the naturalist method from the methods of realism generally. It is certainly incorrect to say that the difference is marked by the relative density of detail. Henry James observes in his essay *The Art of Fiction* that it is above all "solidity of specification" that makes for the illusion of life—the air of reality—in a novel; and the truth of this dictum is borne out by the practice of the foremost modern innovators in this medium, such as Proust, Joyce, and Kafka. It is not, then, primarily the means employed to establish verisimilitude that fix the naturalist imprint upon a work of fiction. A more conclusive test, to my mind, is its treatment of the relation of character to background. I would classify as naturalistic that type of realism in which the individual is portrayed not merely as subordinate to his background but as wholly determined by it—that type of realism, in other words, in which the environment displaces its inhabitants in the role of the hero. Theodore Dreiser, for example, comes as close as any American writer to plotting the careers of his characters strictly within a determinative process. The financier Frank Cowperwood masters his world and emerges as its hero, while the "little man" Clyde Griffiths is the victim whom it grinds to pieces; yet hero and victim alike are essentially implements of environmental force, the carriers of its contradictions upon whom it stamps success or failure—not entirely at will, to be sure, for people are marked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

biologically from birth—but with sufficient autonomy to shape their fate.

In such a closed world there is patently no room for the singular, the unique, for anything in fact which cannot be represented plausibly as the product of a particular social and historical complex. Of necessity the naturalist must deal with experience almost exclusively in terms of the broadly typical. He analyses characters in such a way as to reduce them to standard types. His method of construction is accretive and enumerative rather than analytical or narrational; and this is so because the quantitative development of themes, the massing of detail and specification, serves his purpose best. He builds his structures out of literal fact and precisely documented circumstance, thus severely limiting the variety of creative means at the disposal of the artist.

This quasi-scientific approach not only permits but, in theory at least, actually prescribes a neutral attitude in the sphere of values. In practice, however, most naturalists are not sufficiently detached or logical to stay put in such an ultra-objective position. Their detractors are wrong in denying them a moral content; the most that can be said is that theirs is strictly functional morality, bare of any elements of gratuity or transcendence and devoid of the sense of personal freedom.* Clearly such a perspective allows for very little self-awareness on the part of characters. It also removes the possibility of a tragic resolution of experience. The world of naturalist fiction is much too big, too inert, too hardened by social habit and material necessity, to allow for that tenacious self-assertion of the human by means of which tragedy justifies and ennobles its protagonists. The only grandeur naturalism knows is the grandeur of its own methodological achievement in making available a vast inventory of minutely described phenomena, in assembling an enormous quantity of data and arranging them in a rough figuration of reality. *Les Rougon-Macquart* stands to this day as the most imposing monument to this achievement.

But in the main it is the pure naturalist—that monstrous offspring of the logic of a method—that I have been describing here. Actually no such literary animal exists. Life always triumphs over methods, over formulas and theories. There is scarcely a

* Chekhov remarks in one of his stories that "the sense of personal freedom is the chief constituent of creative genius."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

single novelist of any importance wearing the badge of naturalism who is all of a piece, who fails to compensate in some way for what we miss in his fundamental conception. Let us call the roll of the leading names among the French and American naturalists and see wherein each is saved.

The Goncourts, it is true, come off rather badly, but even so, to quote a French critic, they manage "to escape from the crude painting of the naked truth by their impressionistic mobility" and, one might add, by their mobile intelligence. Zola's case does not rest solely on our judgment of his naturalist dogmas. There are entire volumes by him—the best, I think, is *Germinal*—and parts of volumes besides, in which his naturalism, fed by an epic imagination, takes on a mythic cast. Thomas Mann associates him with Wagner in a common drive toward an epic mythicism:

> They belong together. The kinship of spirit, method, and aims is most striking. This lies not only in the ambition to achieve size, the propensity to the grandiose and the lavish; nor is it the Homeric leitmotiv alone that is common to them; it is first and foremost a special kind of naturalism, which develops into the mythical. . . . In Zola's epic . . . the characters themselves are raised up to a plane above that of every day. And is that Astarte of the Second Empire, called Nana, not symbol and myth?" (*The Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner*).

Zola's prose, though not controlled by an artistic conscience, overcomes our resistance through sheer positiveness and expressive energy—qualities engendered by his novelistic ardor and avidity for recreating life in all its multiple forms.* As for Huysmans, even in his naturalist period he was more concerned with style than with subject-matter. Maupassant is a naturalist mainly by alliance, i.e. by virtue of his official membership in the School of Médan; actually he follows a line of his own, which takes off from naturalism never to return to it. There are few militant naturalists among latter-day French writers. Jules Romains is sometimes spoken of as one, but the truth is that he is an epigone of all literary doctrines, including his own. Dreiser is still unsurpassed so far as American naturalism goes, though just at present he may well be the least readable. He has traits that make for survival—a Balzacian grip on the machinery of money

* Moreover, it should be evident that Zola's many faults are not rectified but merely inverted in much of the writing—so languidly allusive and decorative—of the literary generations that turned their backs on him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and power; a prosiness so primary in texture that if taken in bulk it affects us as a kind of poetry of the commonplace and ill-favored; and an emphatic eroticism which is the real climate of existence in his fictions—Eros hovering over the shambles. Sinclair Lewis was never a novelist in the proper sense that Zola and Dreiser are novelists, and, given his gift for exhaustive reporting, naturalism did him more good than harm by providing him with a ready literary technique. In Farrell's chronicles there is an underlying moral code which, despite his explicit rejection of the Church, seems to me indisputably orthodox and Catholic; and his Studs Lonigan—a product of those unsightly urban neighborhoods where youth prowls and fights to live up to the folk-ideal of the "regular guy"—is no mere character but an archetype, an eponymous hero of the street-myths that prevail in our big cities. The naturalism of Dos Passos is most completely manifested in *U. S. A.*, tagged by the critics as a "collective" novel recording the "decline of our business civilization." But what distinguishes Dos Passos from other novelists of the same political animus is a sense of justice so pure as to be almost instinctive, as well as a deeply elegiac feeling for the intimate features of American life and for its precipitant moments. Also, *U. S. A.* is one of the very few naturalist novels in which there is a controlled use of language, in which a major effect is produced by the interplay between story and style. It is necessary to add, however, that the faults of Dos Passos' work have been obscured by its vivid contemporaneity and vital political appeal. In the future, I think, it will be seen more clearly than now that it dramatizes social symptoms rather than lives and that it fails to preserve the integrity of personal experience.*

It is not hard to demonstrate the weakness of the naturalist method by abstracting it, first, from the uses to which individual authors put it and, second, from its function in the history of

* I do not quite see on what grounds some critics and literary historians include such writers as Faulkner, Hemingway, and Caldwell in the naturalist school. I should think that Faulkner is exempted by his prodigious inventiveness and fantastic humor. Hemingway is a realist on one level, in his attempts to catch the "real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion"; but he is also subjective, given to self-portraiture and to playing games with his ego; there is very little study of background in his work, a minimum of documentation. Caldwell is a novelist of rural abandon—and comedy. His Tobacco Road is a sociological area only in patches; most of it is exotic landscape.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

modern literature. The traditionalist critics judge it much too one-sidedly in professing to see in its rise nothing but spiritual loss—an invasion of the arcanum of art by uncouth scientific ideas. The point is that this scientific bias of naturalism was historically productive of contradictory results. Its effect was certainly depressive insofar as it brought mechanistic notions and procedures into writing. But it should be kept in mind that it also enlivened and, in fact, revolutionized writing by liquidating the last assets of "romance" in fiction and by purging it once and for all of the idealism of the "beautiful lie"—of the long-standing inhibitions against dealing with the underside of life, with those inescapable day-by-day actualities traditionally regarded as too "sordid" and "ugly" for inclusion within an esthetic framework. If it were not for the service thus rendered in vastly increasing the store of literary material, it is doubtful whether such works as *Ulysses* and even *Remembrance of Things Past* could have been written. This is not clearly understood in the English speaking countries, where naturalism, never quite forming itself into a "movement," was at most only an extreme emphasis in the general onset of realistic fiction and drama. One must study, rather, the Continental writers of the last quarter of the 19th Century in order to grasp its historical role. In discussing the German naturalist school of the 1880's, the historian Hans Naumann has this to say, for instance:

> Generally it can be said that to its early exponents the doctrine of naturalism held quite as many diverse and confusing meanings as the doctrine of expressionism seemed to hold in the period just past. Imaginative writers who at bottom were pure idealists united with the dry-as-dust advocates of a philistine natural-scientific program on the one hand and with the shameless exploiters of erotic themes on the other. All met under the banner of naturalism—friends today and enemies tomorrow. . . . But there was an element of historical necessity in all this. The fact is that the time had come for an assault, executed with glowing enthusiasm, against the epigones . . . that it was finally possible to fling aside with disdain and anger the pretty falsehoods of life and art (*Die Deutsche Dichtung der Gegenwart*, Stuttgart, 1930, p. 144).

And he adds that the naturalism of certain writers consisted simply

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in their "speaking honestly of things that had heretofore been suppressed."

But to establish the historical credit of naturalism is not to refute the charges that have been brought against it in recent years. For whatever its past accomplishments, it cannot be denied that its present condition is one of utter debility. What was once a means of treating material truthfully has been turned, through a long process of depreciation, into a mere convention of truthfulness, devoid of any significant or even clearly definable literary purpose or design. The spirit of discovery has withdrawn from naturalism; it has now become the common denominator of realism, available in like measure to the producers of literature and to the producers of kitsch. One might sum up the objections to it simply by saying that it is no longer possible to use this method *without taking reality for granted.* This means that it has lost the power to cope with the ever-growing element of the problematical in modern life, which is precisely the element that is magnetizing the imagination of the true artists of our epoch. Such artists are no longer content merely to question particular habits or situations or even institutions; it is reality itself which they bring into question. Reality to them is like that "open wound" of which Kierkegaard speaks in his *Journals*: "A healthy open wound; sometimes it is healthier to keep a wound open; sometimes it is worse when it closes."

There are also certain long-range factors that make for the decline of naturalism. One such factor is the growth of psychological science and, particularly, of psychoanalysis. Through the influence of psychology literature recovers its inwardness, devising such forms as the interior monologue, which combines the naturalistic in its minute description of the mental process with the anti-naturalistic in its disclosure of the subjective and the irrational. Still another factor is the tendency of naturalism, as Thomas Mann observes in his remarks on Zola, to turn into the mythic through sheer immersion in the typical. This dialectical negation of the typical is apparent in a work like *Ulysses*, where "the myth of the *Odyssey*," to quote from Harry Levin's study of Joyce, "is superimposed upon the map of Dublin" because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only a myth could "lend shape or meaning to a slice of life so broad and banal." And from a social-historical point of view this much can be said, that naturalism cannot hope to survive the world of 19th century science and industry of which it is the product. For what is the crisis of reality in contemporary art if not at bottom the crisis of the dissolution of this familiar world? Naturalism, which exhausted itself in taking an inventory of this world while it was still relatively stable, cannot possibly do justice to the phenomena of its disruption.

One must protest, however, against the easy assumption of some avant-gardist writers that to finish with naturalism is the same as finishing with the principle of realism generally. It is one thing to dissect the real, to penetrate beneath its faceless surface and transpose it into terms of symbol and image; but the attempt to be done with it altogether is sheer regression or escape. Of the principle of realism it can be said that it is the most valuable acquisition of the modern mind. It has taught literature how to take in, how to grasp and encompass, the ordinary facts of human existence; and I mean this in the simplest sense conceivable. Least of all can the novelist dispense with it, as his medium knows of no other principle of coherence. In Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* there is a famous passage in which the novelist Edouard enumerates the faults of the naturalist school. "The great defect of that school is that it always cuts a slice of life in the same direction: in time, lengthwise. Why not in breadth? Or in depth? As for me, I should like not to cut at all. Please understand: I should like to put everything into my novel." "But I thought," his interlocutor remarks, "that you want to abandon reality." Yes, replies Edouard, "my novelist wants to abandon it; but I shall continually bring him back to it. In fact that will be the subject; the struggle between the facts presented by reality and the ideal reality."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

London Letter

Dear Editors:

I write this letter at a moment when it is almost certain to be overtaken and swamped by events. We are still in the same state of frozen crisis as we were three months ago. Cripps is still enigmatically in office, gradually losing credit with the Left but believed by many to be waiting his moment to leave the Government and proclaim a revolutionary policy. Such a development as there has been is definitely in a reactionary direction. Many people besides myself have noticed an all-round increase in blimpishness, a drive against giving the war an anti-Fascist colour, a general shedding of the phony radicalism of the past two years. The India business twitched the masks off many faces, including Lord Rothermere's. This seems to violate the principle that every regime moves to the Left in moments of disaster, and vice versa, for one could hardly describe the last six months as triumphant. But something or other appears to have made the blimps feel much more sure of themselves.

There are a few minor political happenings to record. Sir Richard Acland's fairly radical Forward March group (a sort of Christian Socialism) has amalgamated with Priestley's somewhat less radical 1941 Committee and the movement is calling itself Commonwealth. I believe the amalgamation happened somewhat against Acland's will. They have now been joined by Tom Wintringham, a useful demagogue, but I don't think these people should be taken seriously, though they have won one by-election. Trotskyism has at last got itself into the news owing to the threatened prosecution of a weekly paper, the *Socialist Appeal*. I believe this is still running, though in danger of suppression. I managed to get hold of one copy of it — the usual stuff, but not a bad paper. The group responsible for it are said to number 500. The Rothermere press is especially active in chasing the Trotskyists. The *Sunday Dispatch* denounces Trotskyism in almost exactly the terms used by the orthodox Communists. The *Sunday Dispatch* is one of the very worst of the gutter papers (murders, chorus girls' legs and the Union Jack) and belongs to the press which before the war outdid all others in kow-towing to Fascism, describing Hitler as late as the early months of 1939 as "a great gentleman." The *Daily Worker* has been de-suppressed and is to reappear on September 7th. This was the necessary sequel to lifting the ban on the Communist press in India. Communist literature at the moment is chiefly concerned with urging the opening of a second front, but pamphlets are also issued attacking all M.P.'s of whatever party who vote against the Government. The anti-Trotskyist pamphlets now being issued are barely distinguishable from those of the Spanish civil war period, but go somewhat further in mendacity. The Indian issue makes a certain amount of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stir here, but less than one would expect because all the big newspapers have conspired to misrepresent it and the Indian intellectuals in this country go out of their way to antagonize those likeliest to help them. The Vansittart controversy rumbles on in books, pamphlets, correspondence columns and the monthly reviews. "Independent" candidates, some of them plain mountebanks, tour the country, fighting by-elections. Several of them have a distinct Fascist tinge. Nevertheless there is no sign of any Fascist mass movement emerging.

That seems to me the whole of the political news. It has been in my mind for some time past that you might be interested to hear something about the minor social changes occurring in this country — what one might call the mechanical results of war. The price of nearly everything is controlled, and controlled rather low, which leads to black marketing of luxury foods, but this is perhaps less damaging to morale than the shameless profiteering that went on last time. The interesting point is whether the food restrictions are affecting public health and in what direction they are altering the national diet. A certain number of people with small fixed incomes — Old Age Pensioners are the extreme instance — are now in desperate financial straits, and the allowances paid to soldiers' wives are wretched enough, but as a whole the purchasing power of the working class has increased. My own opinion is that on average people are better nourished than they used to be. Against this is the increase in tuberculosis, which may have a number of causes but must be due in some cases to malnutrition. But though it is difficult to be sure with no standard of comparison, I can't help feeling that people in London have better complexions than they used, and are more active, and that one sees less grossly fat people. English working people before the war, even when very highly paid, lived on the most unwholesome diet it is possible to imagine, and the rationing necessarily forces them back to simpler food. It is strange to learn, for instance, that with an adult milk ration of three pints a week, milk consumption has actually increased since the war. The most sensational drop has been in the consumption of sugar and tea. Plenty of people in England before the war ate several pounds of sugar a week. Two ounces of tea is a miserable ration by English standards, though alleviated by the fact that small children who don't drink tea draw their ration. The endlessly stewing teapot was one of the bases of English life in the era of the dole, and though I miss the tea myself I have no doubt we are better without it. The wheatmeal bread is also an improvement, though working people don't as a rule like it.

War and consequent abandonment of imports tend to reduce use to the natural diet of these islands, that is, oatmeal, herrings, milk, potatoes, green vegetables and apples, which is healthy if rather dull. I am not certain how much of our own food we are now producing, but it would be of the order of 60 or 70 percent. Six million extra acres have been ploughed in England since the war, and nine million in Great Britain

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as a whole. After the war Britain must necessarily become more of an agricultural country, because, however the war ends, many markets will have disappeared owing to industrialization in India, Australia, etc. In that case we shall have to return to a diet resembling that of our ancestors, and perhaps these war years are not a bad preparation. The fact that, owing to evacuation, hundreds of thousands of town-born children are now growing up in the country may help to make the return to an agricultural way of life easier.

The clothes rationing is now beginning to take effect in a general shabbiness. I had expected it to accentuate class differences, because it is a thoroughly undemocratic measure, hardly affecting well-to-do people who have large stocks of clothes already. Also, the rationing only regulates the number of garments you can buy and has nothing to do with the price, so that you give up the same number of coupons for a hundred-guinea mink coat and a thirty-shilling waterproof. However, it now seems rather "the thing" for people not in uniform to look shabby. Evening dress has practically disappeared so far as men are concerned. Corduroy trousers and, in women, bare legs are on the increase. There hasn't yet been what one could call a revolutionary change in clothing, but there may be one owing to the sheer necessity of cutting down wastage of cloth. The Board of Trade tinkers with the problem by, for example, suppressing the turn-ups of trouser ends, but is already contemplating putting everyone into battledress. The quality of cloth is deteriorating, though less than I had expected. Cosmetics are becoming scarce. Cigarettes have lost their cellophane and greaseproof wrappings and are sold in cheap paper packets or loose. Writing paper gets more and more like toilet paper while toilet paper resembles sheet tin. Crockery is somewhat scarce and a hideous white "utility" hardware, the sort of thing you would expect to see in prison, is being produced. All articles which are not controlled, for instance furniture, linen, clocks, tools, rocket to fantastic prices. Now that the basic petrol ration has stopped private cars are very much rarer on the roads. In the country many people are taking to pony traps again. In London there are no conveyances, except very occasional taxis, after midnight. It is becoming a common practice when you dine at anybody else's house to sleep there. What with the air raids and fire-watching people are so used to sleeping out of their beds that they can kip down anywhere. The fuel shortage hasn't yet made itself felt, but it is going to do so about January. For long past the coal owners have been successfully sabotaging the attempts to introduce fuel rationing, and it is considered that this winter we shall be 25 million tons of coal short. Buildings everywhere are growing very shabby, not only from air raid damage but from lack of repairs. Plaster peeling off, windows patched with linen or cardboard, empty shops in every street. Regency London is becoming almost ruinous. The beautiful but flimsy houses, no longer lived in, are falling to pieces with damp and neglect. On the other hand the parks are improved out of recognition by the removal of the railings

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for scrap iron. As a rule these have gone from the gardens in the squares as well, but in places the rich and powerful manage to cling to their railings and keep the populace out. Generally speaking, where there is money, there are railings.

One periodical reminder that things *have changed* in England since the war is the arrival of American magazines, with their enormous bulk, sleek paper and riot of brilliantly-coloured adverts urging you to spend your money on trash. English adverts of before the war were no doubt less colourful and enterprising than the American ones, but their mental atmosphere was similar, and the sight of a full-page ad on shiny paper gives one the sensation of stepping back into 1939. Periodicals probably give up to advertisements as great a proportion of their dwindled bulk as before, but the total amount of advertisement is far smaller and the government ads constantly gain on the commercial ones. Everywhere there are enormous hoardings standing empty. In the Tube stations you can see an interesting evolutionary process at work, the commercial ads growing smaller and smaller (some of them only about 1 ft. by 2 ft.) and the official ones steadily replacing them. This, however, only reflects the dwindling of internal trade and does not point to any deep change of outlook. An extraordinary feature of the time is advertisements for products which no longer exist. To give just one example: the word IRON in large letters, with underneath it an impressive picture of a tank, and underneath that a little essay on the importance of collecting scrap iron for salvage; at the bottom, in tiny print, a reminder that after the war Iron Jelloids will be on sale as before. This throws a sort of sidelight on the strange fact, recently reported by the Mass Observers and confirmed by my own limited experience, that many factory workers are actually *afraid* of the war ending, because they foresee a prompt return to the old conditions, with three million unemployed, etc. The idea that *whatever happens* old-style capitalism is doomed and we are in much more danger of forced labour than of unemployment, hasn't reached the masses except as a vague notion that "things will be different." The advertisements that seem to have been least changed by the war are those for theatres and patent medicines. Certain drugs are unobtainable, but the British have lost none of their old enthusiasm for medicine-taking, and the consumption of aspirin, phenacetin, etc., has no doubt increased. All pubs without exception sell aspirins, and various new proprietary drugs have appeared. One is named Blitz, the lightning pick-me-up.

Once again I may have seemed to talk to you about very trivial things, but these minor changes in our habits, all tending towards a more equal way of life and a lessened reliance on imported luxuries, could have their importance in the difficult transition period which must occur if Britain becomes a Socialist country. We are growing gradually used to conditions that would once have seemed intolerable and getting to have less of the consumer mentality which both Socialists and capitalists did their best to inculcate in times of peace. Since the introduction of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Socialism is almost certain to mean a drop in the standard of living during the first few years, perhaps this is just as well. But of course the changes in our food and clothes have no meaning unless there is a structural change as well. For many of the same processes occurred during the last war as are occurring now. Then too food was short and money plentiful, agriculture revived, women in vast numbers moved into industry, trade union membership swelled, government interference with private life increased, and the class system was shaken up because of the need for great numbers of officers. But there had been no real shift of power and in 1919 we went back to "normal" with startling speed. I cannot believe that the same thing will happen this time, but I cannot say either that I see concrete evidence that it won't happen. At present the only insurance against it seems to me to lie in what one might call the mechanics of the situation. Old-style capitalism can't win the war, and the events of the past three years suggest that we can't develop a native version of Fascism. Therefore, now as two years ago, one can predict the future in the form of an "either — or": either we introduce Socialism, or we lose the war. The strange, perhaps disquieting fact is that it was as easy to make this prophecy in 1940 as it is now, and yet the essential situation has barely altered. We have been two years on the burning deck and somehow the magazine never explodes.

There are now many American soldiers in the streets. They wear on their faces a look of settled discontent. I don't know how far this may be the normal expression of the American countenance, as against the English countenance, which is mild, vague and rather worried. In the Home Guard we have orders to be punctilious about saluting the officers, which I'm afraid I don't do and which they don't seem to expect. I believe some of the provincial towns have been almost taken over by the American troops. There is already a lot of jealousy, and sooner or later something will have to be done about the differences in pay. An American private gets five times as much as an English one, which has its effect on the girls. Also, working-class girls probably find it rather thrilling to hear the accent they are so used to in the movies emerging from a living face. I don't think the foreign troops here can complain about the way the women have treated them. The Poles have already done their bit towards solving our birth-rate problem.

Yours ever

GEORGE ORWELL
London, England
August 29, 1942

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Police Sergeant Malone and the Six Dead Drinkers

Horace Gregory

My last job was the case of The Six Dead Drinkers:
It has given me dreams and my work is less efficient,
It has shown me the will of death and I am impatient
At the lack of will among those who choose to die,
Even ill-health is a palpable excuse;
I should have dropped the case.

The men were found in a hotel linen closet,
The sixth with a three-inch rope around his neck,
A college student who pretended to be dead,
A fool who whispered
That all youth dies, that he did not wish to live:
His breathing corpse was sent to the Polyclinic
Where they brought him to and washed his hands and feet
And offered him the rewards of war and love.

I wrote the first report: it was "heart-failure,"
Body intact and clean, no stains are visible
On wall or street or floor—
And the victim (if he chooses the occasion)
May wear a judge's gown, or a dinner jacket,
Or the tonneau of a State Department car—
After the police and the Mayor are photographed
Newsmen are always glad to be satisfied.

If it had been a series of gas-house disappearances,
Or a run of phone-booth murders,
Or an Islip heiress who had lost her dog
I would have let
The Fairview psychiatrist reclaim the bodies,
For he had said what no one should forget:

"These men are not quite gone,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They have merely sunk or drifted past their prime:
Each body is a little overweight,
Regular exercise would have done it no great harm;
There is alcoholic content in its blood,
This one is deaf, the other is half-blind,
Another has a scar on its right side
And still another lacks an index finger
Which is sad, but each can be beautifully repaired,
Therapy works wonders for such common ills.
They could weave baskets, or model images in clay,
Dye wool, or trace a pattern on a loom,
Or even kalsomine the clinic walls—
Each could be salvaged and each one could earn
A minimum of fifty cents a day."

But I had my way; I restored them as they were,
Each in the closet as though sitting in a bar,
Friendly, about to speak:
One looked like a school teacher with a glass eye,
Another like a teller in a bank,
Another like a sailor, reefed and spent
On an East River barge, one like a millionaire
Who had been reported missing for a week;
And the last with his smile rolled upward to the ceiling
Might have been a Correspondent in the First World War.

Like one possessed, I sat down among them to hear them talk,
The door closed quietly and the night was dark:
I felt the cold, stilled air against my face,
I knew the danger, I knew how deeply
Sleep flows among the dead, how straight, how far
The unseen distance falls, my body shaking
And held upon a narrow ledge,
my limbs were shadows.

I awoke to throbbing airdromes in the sky,
The nurse above me said:
"You must lie quiet,
You have been telling me secrets for days, for hours,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Throat scorched, lips black and your tongue burning;
You have told them all, there is nothing more to say."

But even as I woke, I could not stop:
There were years more to tell
Of misspent childhoods in the sun at Santa Fe,
Or ten days with a duchess on the Matterhorn,
Or minute views of the Louvre from Eiffel Tower,
Bomb-scares in Jermyn Street, tear-gas in Wilhelmstrasse,
Male sleeping beauty contests at Marseille—
All, all were there,
Even to the least detail,
Memories of girls with the India Ocean in their eyes,
And night-breathing oleander in dark hair,
Words flowing from the lips that could not keep still—
Were there five men in that place, or six, or seven
Whispering my life, or theirs?
I did not know,
I knew only that a phosphorescent, blue-lighted river
Coursed through my veins, that I must talk as if forever
Of everything I had done, or hoped to do.

It was no wonder my recovery was slow,
That I enlisted to begin my life again, to leave the city.
I have heard artillery encourages silence among men—
If they sing, dance, shout or whisper, it does not matter,
The guns speak for them and the sirens blow—
The service leaves no mysteries unsolved;
I have volunteered,
and I am wild to go.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Film Chronicle:
The Eisenstein Tragedy

WAS IT ONLY a dozen years ago that, with pious excitement, we went to "little" movie houses—the very term has disappeared—to see the new films from Russia? Is it so short a time since many of us were writing on the cinema as *the* great modern art form, the machine art whose technique was most in harmony with the dynamism of the machine age, the art that most powerfully affected such peculiarly modern areas as Freud's subconscious and Pavlov's reflexes, the only art that could sometimes bridge the gap between serious creation and mass taste, so that *Birth of a Nation*, Chaplin's comedies, *Potemkin* and a few other films might be said to have been the only works of our time that have been both popular and great? Our enthusiasm was not misplaced, our theories were not unfounded. And yet the wonderful possibilities that lay before the cinema ten years ago have withered into the slick banality of Hollywood and the crude banality of the post-1930 Soviet cinema. The potentialities, which really existed, which, for that matter, still exist and in even richer profusion, simply were not realized, and the cinema gave up its own idiom and technique to become once more what it was before Griffith: a mechanical device for recording stage plays. Like so much else in the last decade, it crept back into the womb, into unconsciousness. It has been many years now since, anywhere in the world, a film has been made which, esthetically speaking, is cinema at all.

These depressing reflections are suggested by Eisenstein's new book.* Dull and platitudinous, it reads more like a conscientious and not too inspired Ph.D. thesis than like the work of the creator of *October* and *Potemkin*. The only valuable part of the book is the Appendices, which reprint some Eisenstein scenarios and articles and give a bibliography of his writings, films, and unrealized projects.

I think *The Film Sense* may best be understood as an attempt by its author to adopt the protective coloration of official Stalinist culture. This explains the platitudes: the distinguishing mark of "an emotionally exciting work" is that it causes "inner creative excitement in the spectator" (p. 35); "the technique of creation recreates a life process, conditioned only by those special circumstances required by art" (p. 43); repetition "may well perform two functions"—(1) "to facilitate the creation of an organic whole," (2) to develop "mounting intensity" (p. 95); etc. It also accounts for the citations from Walt Whitman, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Lewis Carroll, Pliny the Elder and practically everybody

*"The Film Sense." Harcourt, Brace. $3.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

else that strew the pages, apparently to show that Eisenstein has the authority of all past culture on his side. (Time was when that would have worried him!) And it also accounts for the ghastly "official" style in which the book seems to have been written—possibly Mr. Jay Leyda, the translator, is here partly responsible—so very different from the expressionist fireworks of Eisenstein's earlier writing. In fact, I would almost venture to say that Eisenstein has modelled his prose on Stalin's; there is the characteristic turgidity; the lingering over the obvious; even the familiar catechism form—isn't this a perfect echo: "What was the distortion in our attitude at that time to this indisputable phenomenon? The error lay . . . etc."

Above all, this hypothesis accounts for the remarkable change in Eisenstein's conception of montage. "There was a period in Soviet cinema," he begins his book, "when montage was proclaimed 'everything.' Now we are at the close of a period during which montage has been regarded as 'nothing.' Regarding montage as neither nothing nor everything, I consider it opportune at this juncture to recall that montage is just as indispensable a component of film production as any other element of film effectiveness." Thus montage, once the distinguishing principle of the Eisenstein school, has become simply one among many technical devices. Eisenstein has furthermore broadened his definition of montage until the term now merely describes any relation of elements in art. He has converted his old battlecry into a platitude. We are told that the "basic aim and function" of montage is "connected and sequential exposition of the theme, the material, the plot, the action . . . the simple matter of telling a connected story." This, he frankly remarks, is, of all aspects of montage, "the one really immune to challenge"—as indeed it is, since not even a Soviet commissar would deny the need for "a connected story." This is a complete reversal of Eisenstein's former theory. In his article, "The Cinematographic Principle and Japanese Culture," in *transition* for Spring-Summer, 1930, Eisenstein denounced the idea that montage is "a junction of elements" as "a most pernicious method of analysis." He continued: "By what then is characterised montage . . . ? By collision. . . . By conflict. By collision. . . . From the collision of two given factors arises a concept. Linkage is, in my interpretation, only a possible *special* case. . . . Thus, montage is conflict. The basis of every art is always conflict."

Eisenstein gives no explanation for this reversal, in fact does not mention that a reversal has taken place. Soviet culture doesn't build on the past, any more than Stalinist politics do. The Party line, in art as in politics, changes overnight into a flat contradiction of yesterday's line, so that the present is related to the past only as good is to evil, or black to white; the past is simply scrapped, buried, forgotten. Soviet artists have no tradition; they must wipe off the past, as one wipes off a blackboard, the day the line changes. They are unable to learn from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the past, and their culture is shallow and undeveloped since it is constantly uprooted.

Eisenstein's change of mind about montage has nothing to do with esthetic theory; it is simply an adaptation to the political pressures which have crushed all Soviet art in the last decade, and whose impact on the cinema I described in a series of articles in PARTISAN REVIEW several years ago. The outlawry of "formalism," i.e. avant-garde experiment, in favor of "social realism" was partly an expression of the Philistine taste of the new-rich Stalinist bureaucracy, partly a move to harness art to the immediate service of mass propaganda (cf. Stalin's famous directive to Soviet composers to produce tunes the people can whistle on their way to work). In the triumph of the "linkage" over the "conflict" concept of montage these factors are involved — "linkage" is the Hollywood method, after all—and also another principle. The cinema is a dramatic art form, and dramatic structure depends largely on the tension created by conflict; but there cannot be conflict in a totalitarian state, since there is only one principle, one set of values authorized to be publicly expressed. I suggest, somewhat tentatively, that there is an intrinsically revolutionary quality to the conflict-montage of Eisenstein's *October* (1927), while the linkage-montage of *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), which robs it of any dramatic interest and makes it a static kind of masque or pageant, is in itself counter-revolutionary.

The grandeurs and the miseries of the modern artist find high expression in Eisenstein's career. In the decade following the October revolution, his three great films—*Potemkin*, *October* and *Old and New*—were perhaps the supreme expression of the remarkable flowering of avant-garde art in the springtime of the new society. By 1929 the Stalinist bureaucracy had consolidated its hold on the State apparatus, and the great period of creativity in the arts was over. That year Eisenstein got permission to travel abroad. Whatever hopes he may have had of finding a more congenial milieu in the capitalist world—his difficulties with Stalin had begun as early as 1927, when he was forced to eliminate Trotsky's figure from all scenes of *October* — were frustrated with remarkable thoroughness. In Paris the police forbade the showing of *Old and New* to a private audience at the Sorbonne. He travelled on to Hollywood, where Paramount put him under a six-month contract with much publicity, and frustrated his attempts to make any movies. There followed the tragi-comedy of the Mexican film he made for a group of liberals headed by Upton Sinclair, which ended in Sinclair's asserting his property rights in the unedited film (which he later turned over to a Hollywood hack to chop into shorts) and Eisenstein returning empty-handed to Russia. The first indication many of us had as to what was going on in the Soviet cinema was the failure of Amkino to back up Eisenstein's efforts to get his Mexican film—said by many who saw the raw material to be potentially his greatest achievement—out of the hands of Sinclair.

I am told that when Eisenstein returned to Russia he was a beaten man, disillusioned with both the capitalist and the new Stalinist world.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

These followed a long and heartbreaking series of unrealized projects: a cinematization of Marx's *Capital*, of the careers of Ivar Kreuger and Sir Basil Zaharoff; of Vandercook's *Black Majesty*, the Hart-Kaufman comedy, *Once in a Lifetime*, Malraux's *La Condition Humaine;* a comedy called *MMM;* a big historical film covering four centuries of Moscow's history; above all, the humiliating treatment of the only project that got beyond the scenario stage, his half-completed film on peasant life, *Bezhin Meadow*, which was branded "formalist" and officially suppressed in 1937. The only projects Eisenstein has been able to realize since *Old and New* (1929) are *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and the present book. Although in this book, Eisenstein analyzes *Nevsky* as though it were a masterwork, devoting many pages to the technical strategy of a tiny section, the film has always seemed to me empty and boring. It is a slow-paced historical pageant, devoid of any content other than a poster-like kind of patriotism, and quite conventional in its cinematic technique. I think it may be referred to the same strategy of cultural camouflage that produced the book: a patriotic pageant is about as "safe" an art work as it is possible to create in Russia these days. Eisenstein's next film is also to be a historical one, based on Ivan the Terrible. It is immensely significant that the one project Eisenstein was able to complete in the last decade is *Nevsky*, while all the rest, dealing with themes in which there is contemporary life, came to nothing. Back to the womb.

Eisenstein's career has been a tragedy without a hero. He has foresworn his most cherished esthetic theories when they met with official disfavor; viz., his abject behavior when his "formalist" heresy was attacked at the 1935 Film Conference (PARTISAN REVIEW, Aug.-Sept., 1938, pp. 42-5); his confessional article, "The Mistakes of *Bezhin Lug*" (*International Literature*, No. 8, 1937); his use of big-name 'stars' in *Nevsky*, and his acceptance as collaborators in that film of D. Vassilev, the leading "social realist" director, and Teleshiva of the Moscow Art Theatre. (In the twenties he wouldn't have wiped his feet on the Moscow Art Theatre.) He has also issued from time to time the kind of political statements required of Stalinist intellectuals, and with a grossness bordering on the cynical. Examples are "My Subject is Patriotism" (*International Literature*, No. 2, 1939) and the preface to the present volume, in which he envisions "the definitive rise of an art of the cinema" as a result of Anglo-Soviet-American victory in the present war, and in which he writes: "I have long been tied to America both by a deep love and by the great tradition of film-art. Now these feelings are heightened by the warm friendship in which our people are together delivering powerful blows to the scourge of darkness, blood and savagery, in the fight for the ideals of mankind, culture, humanity and light."* So excessive, indeed,

* "MOSCOW, Feb. 18 (UP): Sergei Eisenstein, one of the most prominent Soviet film directors, today launched a Soviet-German cultural cooperation program over the Comintern Radio Station. Broadcasting especially to Germany, Mr. Eisenstein said that friendly Russian-German relations established last year formed a solid base 'for increased cultural cooperation between the two great peoples.'"—*N. Y. Times*, Feb. 19, 1940.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

has been Eisenstein's capitulation to the demands of the Stalinist bureaucracy that a friend of mine thinks he is satirizing Stalinist culture by wholly conforming to it. He cites the case of Ernst Jünger, whose *Auf den Marmorklippen* we reviewed in July-August, who several years ago satirized the Nazi blood-and-race ideology by publishing, in Germany, a work carrying it to extreme conclusions. This theory is psychologically possible, from what I know of Eisenstein's personality. Two considerations, however, seem to make it unlikely: (1) Eisenstein's failure to produce anything of interest in the last decade (which argues that he made a sincere, opportunist effort to conform); (2) the fact that this mode of behavior, fantastic to our eyes, is the norm in the Soviet Union today, as was shown in the Moscow trials and in the esthetic capitulations of artists like Pudovkin and Shostakovich.

There is a modern sentimentality about the artist and intellectual which pictures him as a Prometheus defying the gods of totalitarianism in the name of Art and Culture. Such defiances are not unknown, but they are generally delivered from a safe distance—California is an ideal location. When, as in Russia, the artist-intellectual has remained within the totalitarian borders, he has reacted pretty much as Eisenstein has, submitting in esthetic as well as political matters. About the only heroes in the tragedy of Stalinist culture were Mayakovsky and Yessenin, who instinctively chose suicide to creative death. The Nazi order is by now old and extensive enough for some further evidence to begin to appear. Braque has accepted a high artistic post in occupied France, and Vlaminck, de Segonzac, and Derain are reported to have toured Germany on a "cultural mission." *Pour la Victoire* for Sept. 26 quotes from Marcel Deat's Paris paper, *L'Oeuvre*, a recent announcement that Louis Aragon (together with his old Stalinist comrade-in-arms, Marcel Cachin—and Prince Edmond Bonaparte) has joined the Deat-Doriot fascist party. In an interview in the *N. Y. Herald-Tribune* of Aug. 16, Dr. John Altmann revealed that the greatest of German film directors, G. W. Pabst, famous for the anti-war films, *Westfront*, 1918 and *Kameradschaft*, and for his wonderful cinematization of Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper*, edited the Nazi documentary terror-film, *Victory in the West*. According to *Pic* for Aug. 18, Pabst was secretly working for Abetz while he was in Paris before the war, ostensibly an artist-refugee from Nazism. Such reversals cannot but shock us, just as a book like *The Film Sense* is shocking coming from Eisenstein. But I think we had better get used to such shocks; there are probably more unheroic tragedies to come.

DWIGHT MACDONALD

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ellen Terhune

(*Continued from Page* 475)

At any rate, she withdrew to the ladies' room and stayed there so long that I became uneasy. I found her rigid on a couch, with a worried attendant bending over her and trying to get her to speak. As soon as the concert was finished, Sigismund and I took her back to the hotel. He told me that she had had such fits before, and that they sometimes lasted rather long. On this occasion, however, she came to and got into a cab, though I did not hear her speak again.

I was afraid now that she might be working up to another seizure of the kind. But she smiled and tried to reassure me. "It makes me nervous to play that thing," she said. "I wish I could get it finished. The last part has been driving me crazy, and even this part isn't right yet. — I can see you're thoroughly depressed by it." "Oh, no," I said untruthfully. "I think it's extremely interesting." She smiled at the conventional evasion, and I disliked having to talk so to Ellen.

I asked her before I left whether there were somebody in the house, and she told me that there was. I didn't like to remind her of the concert: she was the kind of self-managing woman that it is hard to do anything for. I told her that she must let me know if there was any way I could help her; and she apologized for talking so much about herself — "but you're one of the few people I can talk to. Out here you're the only one — I don't really know any more even who the people are who live here, though we used to know everybody."

It was all pretty awful, I thought, as I walked along the drive toward the gate, between the lawns which the late sun was gilding and the magnificent collection of trees (a true collection planted by the doctor and including many curiosities and rarities), with the vision of Ellen's wide sweating forehead under her none-to-abundant brown hair and of her eyes which I had thought in the last moments of my visit were getting a little out of touch with me till they had come again to responsive life at the moment of our parting. She did not know even who lived here, she had said; and there had been a few seconds just now when I had been talking about her music and she had seemed to stumble in replying and to stare and go into herself when I had not been quite sure she knew *me*.

I turned my mind, I confess, with a certain self-indulgence, to a party I was going to that evening: one of those gatherings where great quantities of tan-backed girls and scarlet-faced men, with highballs fizzing in their hands, lift laughing and strident voices among glass-topped cocktail tables and lamps that give indirect lighting.

II

I dropped in on her again in September when I came back from a short summer trip. I noticed that Ellen's place showed signs of restoration and refreshment. The honeysuckle on the fence had been trimmed, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the name on the gates, "Vallombroso," had evidently been recently repainted. I had the impression that the trees and the shrubbery had also been recently pruned; and the sails had been put back on the windmill, which was turning in a chilly wind that came up suddenly as I entered the driveway.

Ellen herself I found rejuvenated in a most surprising way. She no longer had rings under her eyes, and she displayed a kind of nervous vitality which I thought at first was overwrought but which I presently came to feel as natural. The rather recessive attitude which had grown on her with her alienation from Sigismund seemed to have given way to a readiness to meet and taste life. It seemed to me that the definite break with him, which I noticed she never mentioned, had had the effect of releasing her to revert to her own personality, which, I thought, must have suffered and shrunk in the course of her relationship with Sigismund; and it seemed to be a symbol of this that she had completely changed her style of dressing and her way of doing her hair. The last time I had seen her she had been wearing the short skirt of 1926, and she had at one time had a bob, which had made her head a little *too* mannish; but now she had been letting her hair grow, and, parting it in the middle and brushing it over her ears, had coiled it at the back of her head and stuck a comb at an angle behind it, and she was wearing a white shirtwaist with full sleeves and a long green-plaid skirt, which were old-fashioned but very becoming to her. She looked somehow smarter than she had before. I complimented her on her appearance, but said nothing about the antiquity of the costume. I thought at first that she had got it out of some trunk and that it must be at least twenty years old; but as I looked at it, it seemed to me new, and I concluded that she had had it made to order. It was an affectation, of course, perhaps a self-conscious protest against Sigismund; but I rather enjoyed it for the emphasis it gave to the non-fashionable character of her work: it was a joke on the cult of jazz and the professional lost generation that one of the most original American artists should have the aspect of a period piece.

My relation with Ellen today seemed somehow a little less intimate. She was not alienated as I had felt her to be at the end of my last visit, as if she were losing the outside world; but it was as if her perceptions were dimmed by the vividness of her musical interests. She looked at me for a moment when I first appeared as if she were not quite sure that she recognized me, replying rather formally to my greeting; and at one point she seemed to assume that I had personally known Dr. Bristead. She was more obviously excited about her music than I had ever seen her before and talked as if she had been composing with a new gust of creative energy. She told me about playing some piano pieces — a suite which she had just written — at the invitation of Arthur Whiting, at a concert given in his studio, at which the Schirmers and the Damrosches had been present, and on a program with d'Indy and Loeffler. Though she always maintained the attitude of the advanced and self-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

confident woman who is not afraid of conventions and who knows that she can compete with men in fields which they have largely monopolized, she was obviously gratified by this; and I was at first a little puzzled at her pleasure in recognition from so relatively antiquated a quarter; but I felt that she was perhaps, as sometimes happens, falling back for reassurance in her new personal loneliness on appreciation of her work from anywhere and by anybody. "Well, that makes you a classic!"—I smiled. "They don't really approve of me at all," she replied. "They think I'm a freak like Carrie Nation. Arthur Whiting made one of his sly jokes about my being more masculine than Debussy. But Whiting at least is no fool. Some of the people there are still sure that Debussy is a lunatic, and they think that my use of the whole-tone scale has something to do with Max Nordau's Degeneration—and that the whole thing's mixed up with woman suffrage. I don't know why American musicians have to be such a lot of old women!"

Yet she seemed to me herself today unmistakably and agreeably feminine. The very outspokenness and challenge to men which the women of that generation had cultivated when they set out on professional careers characterized her as a woman more vividly than the sexually neutralized role of the business-girl or bar-companion did the women of my own generation; and she had also a pretty keen instinct to make her attractiveness felt: she talked with a certain flashing play with her proud and arresting eyes. So she must have looked, I imagined, in the days when she had been wholly independent and after her grandfather's death.

By this time our old understanding had completely been re-established, and she was letting herself go. She was very amusing and ruthless about the older American composers—the fancy dress costumes from Italy and France and the mythological insipidities which played so large a part in their work: the reveries at Carcassonne and the tone-poems on *Pippa Passes,* the Icaruses and Daphnes and Psyches, the sarabands of satyrs and nymphs. "David Emery Nickerson's *Semiramis,*" she said, "is simply Mrs. Wentworth of Boston. In the first part you see her in her Brookline house surrounded by obedient Nubians; in the second, she has a conversation with David Emery Nickerson and he reads her some sonnets by Rossetti; in the third, she regrets that she can never be married to David Emery Nickerson and goes in for social work."

I was rather surprised, however, when she told me that the pieces of her own that she had played at Whiting's concert had titles which seemed to connect them with the impressionism of an earlier period and which did not seem characteristic of the harder and more formal style in which she had lately been working. They were *Gulls off the Coast of Nantucket, The Lighthouse,* and *The Island Cemetery*—the products, she said, of her vacation. I forebore to ask about the sonata which had seemed to worry her so. She had evidently been to Nantucket since the time I had seen her in August, and managed to come back refreshed.

I begged her to play her new suite and she consented with a frank-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness and grace which seemed youthful and contrasted with the professional matter-of-factness, that matter-of-factness of the middle-aged artist that has almost become grim, with which she had taken me into her workshop before. We went again into the adjoining music-room, where the cellos and violins, even the old dark cracked box of the clavichord, looked ripe in the September light, which made things inside seem the ruddier for the turn for the colder without. It was pleasant to watch Ellen's straight back, her sure and energetic features, as she took command of the keyboard. And the pieces were lucid and lovely—at moments even thrilling. They did seem to me a lapse into the past: they were so much like other things she had written in a vein I thought she had put behind her. But then, why shouldn't she escape into the past? It was better than going to pieces. I noticed, however, in the last one an insistent reiterated phrase which recalled the obsessive monotony of the movement from the sonata she had played me. "I like the one about the cemetery particularly," I said, wanting to reassure her after our rather painful conversation in connection with the other piece. "I think you've handled that heavy recurrent effect perfectly successfully there." "It returns to solemnity and deadness," she said, playing the last bars again. "I wanted to give the effect of the whole thing being anchored by the graveyard. In a place like that, it's the dead, the men who have died at sea, that give life its price, its seriousness. You feel them under the ground, just lying there and never moving. The cemetery doesn't speak aloud, but everybody knows what it means. Even the lighthouse implies the cemetery—and the gulls can fly around above the graves, they can fly ever so high up above them—but the gulls are just light irresponsible spirits that haven't anything to lose from the sea—the thing that's really serious is the human dead, and the living who are pledged to the dead. The islanders who are dead are lying there like the part of the island that's submerged—all the part that's above water is based on them.—You see I've got suggestions of the same effect in the other pieces, too." She showed me how the flight of the gulls would fall back into the shadow of the earth and how the graveyard returned a deep echo to the pealing of the Lisbon bell.

"Are you sure that that belongs with the gulls and the bell?" I felt that it tarnished the clearness. "No: it *doesn't* belong with them, of course: it's supposed *not* to belong—but it has to be there just the same.—Oh, I know it: it's flat, flat, flat!" she said suddenly, flinging over the leaf and getting up from the piano. "It's the David Emery Nickerson in all of us—or should I say, 'the Mrs. Wentworth of Brookline?'" She smiled and was amusing again.

She had said it as the French would say, "*C'est plat, plat, plat!*" and I had noticed during our conversation an addiction to French gestures and phrases. She had had *toute une histoire* over a manuscript she had sent to a music competition, and she had shrugged over the inefficiency of the old fuddiduds who made the awards. There was a certain fluidity and elegance that might have been brought back from Paris about her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hair and the green silk bow that she wore in her starched white collar and that softened the squareness of her face. That was one curious thing, I reflected as I was walking away from the house, about the effect on American artists of studying abroad. They got in Europe a kind of inoculation with the cultures of alien races which might give them the illusion for a time that they were part of European culture, that, carried along by its current, they had actually been merged in its waters. But in ninety-nine cases this had never affected in any at all vital way the native American base. If this base had no principle of growth of its own, the inoculation simply wore off and left something that was flat, flat, flat.

I found that I was thinking of Ellen as if she had just come back from Paris. In her case, of course, when France had worn off, she *had* had a base that sent up shoots. Yet there was something about those iterated phrases, like a child's repeated sentence or the insurmountable image of a mad person, that wasn't right, wasn't good.

I thought about Ellen often; I hoped she wasn't herself going mad. I tried to call her a few weeks later, and they told me the phone was out of order.

I walked over that afternoon. The trees of Vallombrosa were quite transformed with reds that were blazing or paling, full orange and lemon-yellow, made richer by a slight autumn mist; and they were so much in advance of the trees outside, which were only beginning to turn, that I wondered whether the doctor's rare species were particularly sensitive to frost.

When I had almost reached the house, a girl on a bicycle shot by me, coasting along the drive. She looked toward me when she had set her bicycle against the latticed base of the piazza, and I felt that she expected me to speak to her. But something in her face disconcerted me, and instead of inquiring for Mrs. Soblianski, I asked—perhaps because Sigismund seemed now so remote from that house in the presence of what I took to be a relative and because at the same time it was incorrect to refer to Ellen as "Miss"—whether "Mrs. Terhune" were at home. "Mrs. Terhune is in the city," said the girl. She had green eyes that reminded me of Ellen's and a rather pale indoor face. She wore a bang over her forehead and short hair fluffed out behind, and she had on a white dress with a long skirt and long sleeves and an enormous folded-over collar that completely enveloped her shoulders. I had been startled to note as she rode by me that she was wearing long black stockings. Just the wrong thing for bike-riding—what an archaizing family they were! (I assumed this was some cousin of Ellen's): it made me a little impatient.

"Won't you come in?" she said, as I stood searching her face rather queerly. It was a serious intelligent face, and her manner was so mature that it was difficult to tell her age, though she could not have been more than thirteen or fourteen. I replied that I wouldn't come in but would sit down on the porch for a moment. There were a pair of white wicker-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

backed rockers, and we sat down in them side by side. "How has Mrs. Terhune been?" I inquired, realizing I had said it again. "She had to go to the hospital," said the girl. "Grandfather took her up today." I was startled and troubled to hear it; I hoped it wasn't anything serious. "Grandfather says it isn't serious." I was glad that there had been someone to take care of her. "She may have to have a slight operation—they won't be able to decide for a few days." She had a reasonable and earnest tone and the language of an experienced head nurse; but I saw that she was distressed and keyed-up: she had a nervous little trick like a tic of tossing her bang aside. I wondered about the operation and asked for the name of the hospital, which turned out to be, not, as I expected, the Neurological Institute or anything of the sort, but a gynecological place.

I didn't want to inquire further and presently remarked on the beauty of the trees. She explained to me the different species, of which she knew all the Latin names, with the same peculiar poise and precision, which masked an uncomfortable tenseness. "Haven't you been doing a lot to the place lately?" I asked. She thought a moment and tossed her bang: "We've planted a new copper beech. It was almost the only thing we didn't have. I hope it gets to be as gorgeous as the ones on the place across the road. They look as if they were made of bronze. You could play them on the cello." She did not smile and was not trying to be clever: that was the way they evidently talked in that family. "We have a new birdhouse, too." "Have you really?"—I expressed an interest. "It's a summer hotel for martins. Would you like to see it?" she asked.

She led me by steps down a terrace that smelt rankly of grass in the autumn damp and past large symmetrical maples that had dropped their leaves in round golden rugs, to a cluster of cedars and firs where I did not remember to have been. I noticed that Sigismund's studio, which ought to have been visible from there, had been taken down since summer. There was not a trace of it left; and I was shocked at the thought that Ellen had had it removed out of bitterness. I was amused, when we came to the birdhouse, to see that it had been designed in the same ornamental and obsolete style as the big house itself. There were three stories perforated by windows and numerous cupolas and towers. The young cousin explained to me about purple martins, which, she said, were really steel-blue and opened and shut like scissors. She talked about other birds, too, and I saw that she not only knew their habits and names, but had a kind of poetic perception of their qualities. It occurred to me that Ellen in her girlhood must have perceived things with the same personal vividness. She had once composed, I remembered, a whole suite of little pieces on objects and creatures about the place: the cupola, the stained-glass window, the garden, the pedigreed collie—and yes, there had been a birdhouse.

There was a squirrel-cage not far away, and I went over to see what was in it. It was built around the trunk of an oak and had one of those wheels that they spin. When we came up, a squirrel was madly spinning it. I have always disliked these wheels, which I regard as an imposture on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the squirrels. "Do you think they like to do that?" I asked. "I don't know," the girl seriously answered. "They don't have to go in there, you know. But I suppose it must be rather discouraging for them when they stop and the wheel begins to carry them back. It always makes them start working again even when they must be tired. They're afraid of going backwards, I guess. Yes: I don't think that can be at all pleasant." She gave her bang a twitch. "Some people are sorry they were born, but everybody has a right to their lives, don't you think they have? People just have to go ahead and live."

I thought I caught an echo here of old plays by Bernard Shaw or other writings of the live-your-own-life era, which she had got hold of and which had made an impression on her. But it reminded me also of Ellen and her talk about her mother and father. The girl, of course, was right: you did have to go ahead and live. I felt a little disgusted by Ellen's attempt to undo her own past by having Sigismund's studio removed. After all, he had studied and composed there in the most creditable phase of his career. They had worked together, been something together, even though they had later pulled apart. And now she had struck it out as if it had never been.

As we were watching, the squirrel in the cage stopped running against its treadmill. But it did not behave as the girl had described: it allowed itself to be carried around tail-first for several revolutions, then darted out of the wheel and began rushing up and down and from one corner of the cage to the other, as if it were trying to find a breach.

"Do you like them in cages like that," I asked as we were walking away, "or running around wild?" "When they're wild," she readily replied, "they aren't really any more free than they are when they're kept in cages, if you take the different conditions into account. They can only live in certain places where they can get certain kinds of things to eat, and in the cage they don't have to worry about food because we give them lots of nuts and things—and they're safer than they are outside, because they're protected from the red squirrels. The red squirrels bite the gray squirrels and try to drive them out." She was a formidable little pedant—perhaps a little prig. She could never have been much with other children. It was appalling to think of the figure she would cut among boys and girls of her own age in that outlandish dress and black stockings and with those metal bands on her teeth. I felt, in fact, a certain nervous self-consciousness involved with her precocious complacency.

"I shouldn't mind living in a cage," she went on, "if I was sure I'd get out someday. I *am* in a sort of cage out here." These shifts of hers disconcerted me, and I didn't know how to reply. "Young people often feel they're caged," I said in a tone of lightness and kindness but with a feeling that I was being sententious. "But, as you say, they find the way out." "Grandfather doesn't want me to go away to school, because he says that he and the governess can teach me a great deal better, and when I went to school in New York last winter it did make it rather embarrassing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

because I was so far ahead of all the other girls. But I think that there are other reasons for a girl's going away to school." "Yes, of course there are," I assented—I found myself siding against her grandfather. "I wish you would tell Grandfather that," she said in her sedate way. She evidently assumed I was a friend of her family, or was it merely that we had somehow established a sympathetic understanding? "I will if the occasion presents itself," I found myself replying. "Oh, please do! won't you?— It might help,"—she became for a moment quite girlish; then returned to her judicious tone: "Of course, if anything happened to Mother, I'd have to stay here with Grandfather. I shouldn't be justified in going away."

We had reached the front steps, and I said goodby. She invited me to come again in her most mature manner and hoped, with a twitch of her bang, that her mother would soon be back. I hoped—getting the name right with an effort, as if I were obliged to struggle with some false conception that bulked in my mind without my being able to see it—I hoped that Miss Terhune would soon be better. The effect of this on the girl was baffling for a moment and yet gave me a queer sort of qualm as if I knew I had committed an indiscretion. She suddenly seemed embarrassed, but she handled it with her usual self-possession: "Oh, I'm not really sick. Mother worries about me, but Grandfather says it's not important. It's silly, of course, to have fainting-fits, but I'm not really sick at all!" I saw that she had taken my remark to herself: she must be some sort of niece of Ellen's father. "Well, I hope," I said, "that everybody's better."

As I left her alone on the steps, with the darkened house behind her, in that countryside of deserted residences, the colors of the trees fading in the day-end and the thickening mist, I was visited by a doubt, a pang, by a feeling almost dolorous that lingered, as if I almost knew something about her which I could not remember to have learned, as if I wanted to save her from something. Though I had never quite recognized the fact in the past, I could see now that that house was an unhappy one. I thought of the girl mounting the steps, passing the chairs in which nobody sat, swinging open the large front door with its panelling of varnished oak and its upper and lower parts that were separate—going back into that lampless interior, so full of an American past which seemed to me even at its best so cluttered, middle-class and banal. I had left the place so quiet and dark that it seemed to me even improbable that anyone would come to ring the gongs and summon her in to dinner.

III.

When the summer people in a place like Hecate County go away after the first of September, the people who stay on through the winter are more thrown in on themselves and on each other. New contours of the community emerge; one distinguishes a new scale of values. One gradually becomes interested in neighbors whom it had not occurred to one to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

think interesting at the time when there was more going on; and one broods on other people much more.

I brooded a good deal on Ellen. I sent flowers and a note to the hospital, but I never had any reply. Her phone was still out of order, and I thought I ought to call at the house and find out how she was doing; but for days I was restrained by some instinctive reluctance which would take me into town or to some other neighbor's house when I had set out with the intention of going there.

This reluctance was due to an unpleasant reaction which I had had after my last two visits. One of the symptoms of certain neurotic states is the irrational drop of morale, the depression that may suddenly descend on us and absolutely flatten us out, from some stimulus that seems irrelevant or trifling—a passing sarcasm in conversation directed at someone else, a child ducking a cat in the gutter, a memory drifting into the head of something clumsy one did in one's childhood. I had had a touch of this at one time, and I found that my visits to Ellen's renewed it. This was only, I told myself, vicarious: I was merely being affected accidentally by things that in reality were experienced by others; but it was enough to give me disagreeable sinkings, living as I then did alone, in the evening or even the next afternoon after I had been to Vallombrosa. It was a revival of my old morbidity; but it took a peculiar turn. I would feel suddenly after lunch or dinner that living in the country was hopeless, that I had no communication with other people, and that nothing I was doing meant anything; yet on the other hand I could not see any hope in living in the city or traveling: I knew what human beings were—they might be more or less picturesque in their various environments and climates, and to the young this was a source of excitement; but to me, in my middle thirties, it was desolatingly, incontrovertibly evident that people under any conditions were the same pathetic freaks, and why should I go to the trouble of moving about among them in order to observe the shapes which their defects and distortions could take?

I had had something like this feeling before, though the emphasis on deformity, I believed, was new: but in the past it had led to an impulse which was vaguely and remotely suicidal. Now the impulse was directed toward an act that would be absolutely immediate and definite: to go back to Ellen's house. This seemed a good deal less serious than suicide; yet there was something about it that scared me. For one thing, it presented itself to me as a compulsion imposed from outside myself as to which I had not even the option of yielding on my own terms; and, for another, I felt that in revisiting that house, I was getting into something very queer which I didn't know how to handle. I did my best to resist this compulsion, and I did not allow myself to go till the impulse was no longer felt as morbid and I could put it to myself that I was merely dropping in to inquire about the illness of a friend. Nevertheless, I went: I could only choose one way.

I did, however, semi-consciously, make a point of going early in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

afternoon so that I should not have to be there at nightfall. I offset my shrinking in this respect by insisting to myself that the day itself was overcast and dull. But when I entered the gates of Vallombrosa, the sky became suddenly clear. I looked up: it was almost cloudless; before me the thinning branches and the angles of the slate-covered roof were distinct and a little bleak in the emptied October light; and I recognized, against my intelligence, that each of my last entrances there had been marked by some discontinuity of weather or of the appearance of things on the grounds.

Discomfited, I became self-conscious: like an explorer in an unknown terrain, I scanned the place carefully for changes, without, I told myself, noticing any; then I dropped my eyes to the driveway, where I saw that it had recently been raining there, though that had not been the case outside. There were hoof-marks of horses in the muddy gravel, and what looked like the sharp narrow tracks of a carriage.

I rang the bell and saw as I waited a croquet-set in a long wooden box which I had not noticed before. I felt a little dizzy for a moment, but told myself it was perfectly natural that the visiting girl cousin should have brought it out.—Then a brisk and definite step; an accurate hand on the latch; the door opened, and I found myself confronted with a woman I had never seen—the mother of the girl, no doubt. She bore some resemblance to Ellen: her long nose was a little beakish and her jawbones somewhat stood out; but she was blonder and rather taller, and, though she, too, had the squarish shoulders, she was not so chunky as Ellen; her eyes, though they were green, were bluish and did not have the intelligence and animation of Ellen's.

"Oh, how do you do," she said in a cordial but formal manner, as if, though she did not know me, she knew about me and had expected my visit. I came into the familiar hallway. "Won't you leave your coat and hat here?" she said. I noticed, as I was taking them off, that she gave a sharp glance at my clothes—the glance of a woman who is certain that she knows what is correct and what is not, who is severely and unremittingly critical of everyone with whom she has to do and who is not in the habit of hesitating to make her disapproval felt. But any surprise she may have felt at the unconventionality of *my* clothes could have been nothing to the shock I received when she turned to lead me into the living-room. She was wearing a kind of bustle, a built-out ruffle at the back of her skirt that looked like one of the ruffle-like crests on that elaborate and poisonous jellyfish called the Portuguese man-of-war. She had also a jacket buttoned closely in front, with two little tails that stuck out above the ruffle; and on her dress, which was silk and mauve, were several fringes of lace; at the bottom of the skirt, at the throat and on the sleeves that came just beyond her elbows. It must have been the kind of thing that was in fashion in the middle of the eighties; but the dress was so handsome and so naturally worn that it did not seem obsolete. Her hair was done up high toward the back of her head, and she was wearing black onyx earrings.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The smell of the living-room, though this had been different before, seemed curiously natural, too. It emanated from the fumes of a hot coal-grate red-glowing in the white marble fireplace, from the stuff of the garnet curtains muffling the windows with valances and loops, and from the pinkish flowered thick-napped carpeting which I told myself was not really suffocating but which caused me to say to myself, "Brussels carpet" in the moment before I sat down. But I had been at first so stunned by the whole situation that I had not been able to look at things calmly, and I now subsided into it in a way that seemed to be depriving me of the power to examine them consciously and closely.

"It was kind of you to come," she said. "My father was extremely sorry that he had to go to town. He had word this morning that Mr. Schroeder's condition was worse. It's such a tragedy, isn't it? He was deceived by the people he trusted, and my father says the shock has almost killed him." "Yes: I'm sorry not to see your father," I fell readily into replying. "He told me to tell you you would hear from him," she pursued, going on at once to what was evidently the business before us. "I don't know how far he has described to you my symptoms" . . . "Not in any great detail," I answered.

I told myself, suddenly relieved at hitting on a solution for the strange situation, that the woman was obviously insane and that she was going to tell me about voices and about people who were working against her as they had against Mr. Schroeder. But, instead, she began giving me a very precise, a positively clinical, chronicle of fainting-fits, spells of nausea and convulsive internal pains. I presently grasped that she was pregnant and, in my rather lightheaded embarrassment, I was about to ask her whether she were the mother of the girl I had seen the other day but I pulled myself up at the realization that such a question would be out of character with the role I was allowing myself to assume—since the physician I was supposed to be would undoubtedly know about her children and would probably not have been here the other day. The question, in fact, was impossible; I found that I was powerless to put it—I was powerless to say or do anything that would violate the logic of the scene. And now, with a beating of the heart, but inevitably and by clear recognition, I sank into the consciousness that the woman before me was Ellen's unfortunate mother and that her father was old Dr. Bristead; and I knew—had already known?—that it had been Ellen herself in her girlhood whom I had seen on my previous visit: Ellen when she was still in her girlhood and just before her mother's death; and that the Ellen I had met on the visit before had been Ellen at some time in her twenties when she had just come back from Paris. And now here was her mother, a young woman, just before Ellen's birth. As this picture became plain in my mind, I stiffened and sat perfectly still. I was kept tense by the anxiety to follow her, to say something that played in with the story. The queer thing was that it had now become impossible for me to set myself right with Time, because whenever I summoned to mind the sequence of events in that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

house, it seemed to me perfectly normal: looking out on my series of glimpses from the point of my visit today, the first picture I saw was of Ellen as a girl, and the next was of Ellen as a young woman; further on she was middle-aged—and wasn't this the natural sequence? I beheld her growing older, didn't I? I had a feeling of unreality, yet I couldn't see it any other way. Giddily and intently I listened, inquiring, when it seemed necessary for me to say something: "Did your father prescribe anything for that?" or "How often have you been having these attacks?"

But she needed no prompting to talk. I got the impression that she was rather hypochondriac and was gloating over the tale of her symptoms. She was not at all restrained by the prudery which might have gone with the upholstery of her costume: she was the daughter of an enlightened doctor and she had been taught not to shrink from such matters. Though she was dignified and restrained in the extreme, the very patient objectivity and exactitude with which she described her disorders somehow made demands on the hearer for astonishment and commiseration, and I found myself evincing in my expression and tone a graver and graver concern. "I dare say," she continued, "that my condition has been aggravated by the domestic situation—I suppose my father told you about it." "A little," I replied: I was remembering what Ellen had told me about her parents. "I don't know," she went on with pretended detachment but deadly masochistic hatefulness, "whether a normal parturition is possible under circumstances of that kind: continual scenes that are deeply disturbing and the uncertainty every night as to whether my husband is coming home." "Can't you stay down here?" I suggested. "I don't want to stay longer than two or three days: I'm afraid of what might happen to him without me. When one thinks how even men of fine character like Mr. Schroeder and General Grant—I don't mean that my husband isn't a man of fine character, but he is unstable and a little irresponsible—but when one thinks how even men like that have been ruined and humiliated!"

She now went on to tell me in detail about a physical examination which had been given her by her regular obstetrician and which had disclosed certain structural conditions that he was afraid might make childbirth difficult. "What does your father say about it?" I asked. "He tells me that he doesn't think it's serious, but he wished to consult you." The idea was somehow conveyed to me that she wanted to be advised that it would be dangerous for her to have a baby—not, I thought, that she wouldn't go through with it but she wanted to make her husband suffer by continual complaint and reproach. I felt that I must bite off the interview and escape from that horrible house. Ellen's mother's cold eye and her reasonable smile which masked the morbidity of her pregnancy were exercising over me an influence that I had to struggle to break.

"Everything is so uncertain, isn't it?" Mrs. Terhune was saying—"with all these dreadful disasters. One doesn't know what kind of world one is bringing one's children into. People lose all their resources over night, and one doesn't want a child not to have the things that one has

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had oneself." I answered shortly, got up brusquely, and said that she must come to my office: I would give her an examination there. She seemed puzzled and a little displeased as if she had imagined that this was what I had called for, and suggested that the sooner I could examine her the better, as she felt that her condition was becoming more acute. "I'll phone you tomorrow," I said—then feared I had slipped in my role; they had certainly had telephones then—or now, but had they talked about "phoning" then? I was frightened a moment, then fortified by the thought that my instinct had kept me straight—I was still in the actual world. I almost smiled at the joke; but the woman would not allow me. She looked at me a moment seriously, as if she were a trifle dismayed and even not quite sure what I meant; and I saw that she thought I had spoken of some unfamiliar clinical technique. I seized the moment to shake hands with her reassuringly and get out of the house and away.

All the way down the drive, however, I had the illusion that her insistence was attached to me, lengthening like a rubber band, whose pull I felt growing stiffer as it was thinner and thinner drawn out. At the gate I hoped the pull would snap, but I awaited the moment with a fear that it might not after all bring relief: it was as if I were cheating on some perverse obligation, leaving unfinished some ugly task. Whatever I was leaving behind me—and I did not quite know what it was—I was definitely involved in that thing.

I woke up in the night in a panic: a seizure of horror and disgust which had projected itself in a nightmare. I had thought I was in the hallway of Ellen's house, struggling with the *tromba marina*, which I was trying to carry upstairs. It would catch in the mahogany-stained banisters in such a way that it was difficult to extricate or it would get between my legs and cause me to fall on all fours on the heavily-carpeted stairs. And this was all bound up in some way with the naked Canova Hebe, which I had noted the day before in the hallway, though Ellen had always kept it in a museum-like reception room. The statue in the dream had represented some ideal of nineteenth-century womanhood, symmetrical, smooth and chaste, to which my clumsy mishaps with the obsolete instruments were somehow an impious affront. But then the thing took a sinister turn. I had the bow of the *tromba marina* and I was trying to do something damaging to a modern violin: instead of using it to draw forth music, I was jabbing it into the f-holes; I was compelled to do this, but whenever I did, Mrs. Terhune would shriek in a way that I felt was purposely exaggerated—it was all, as a matter of fact, prearranged—and yet which convicted me of hideous guilt.

I turned on the light to make sure that that woman was not with me there, and as I looked at my green-stained woodwork and my rough-finished plaster walls, whose leaded folding windows opened right on the trees and the grass, I knew that a realization had been pushing to the surface in my sleep. In that loneliness of the woods surrounding my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

house, the meaning pressed in on me with the night. What the woman really wanted me to do was to declare her unfit to have a baby and to recommend a legal abortion. She wanted to spite her husband, the child that was to be, life itself. But why? I couldn't understand her. Was she human or a specter of nightmare? She was real in the sense that I had seen her, with her horrible handsome mauve dress and her shallow and cruel eyes, and that I could not get her out of my head; but in the dream there was somebody behind her, she emanated from somebody else—there had been once when I had seen her in her bedroom just before she started screaming, and the eyes had been bright green, full of intellect, and full not of hypocritical agony but of fixed and unforgiving condemnation.

And now I saw it absolutely clearly: this apparition came from Ellen. It was Ellen who had made of her mother this monster, who was forcing her to get rid of her baby, who was destroying her own existence before it had come out of the womb! And she was somehow forcing me to abet her . . . I got myself to sleep with a book just as the windows were unblotting from night.

And when I woke up, I was no longer so sure. The sun was quite brilliant and bracing: it sent a long pane of light across my breakfast and brought out the whites and yellows of my eggs with their sparkling of salt and pepper; I talked to the soft-spoken colored maid about the movie she had seen the night before; and I stood outside for a moment and was delighted by the deep-orange zinnias, the pom-pom clusters of little lemon marigolds, the scarlet big daisies of cosmos on high and spidery stems that still were bright at the end of October. I decided that my explanation of my visit of the day before had been simply a part of the nightmare. What I had seen was not a woman of the eighties but a contemporary relation of Ellen's, completely insane no doubt but an actual human being, and I must not allow myself to be led by her into getting insane myself. I expelled the whole thing from my mind; read the papers, wrote several letters, and contemplated a trip to the city. I needed the city, I felt.

But when I went for a walk that afternoon, the sun had gone out for the day and the whole thing came back on me again. I saw the situation precisely as I had seen it in the middle of the night, and I could not see it in any other way—I could not get outside it. And I now felt not merely an irrational pull toward the house where Ellen lived; I had a fear it would come to find me—that the past might have its gangsters, too, who could wait for you and meet you on the autumn roads where so little traffic passed. And I presently turned and came home and lay on a couch and brooded.

Yet I could not go to town, I now told myself: there was something I could not leave unfinished. I had to see it finished, and I had to do my best to see that it was finished as it should be. Precisely what this meant I did not know—except that it imposed upon me a duty to stand up to the Terhunes and their house. I must not be afraid to go out, I must not be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

afraid to pass the place; I must even be not afraid to go back there, but I must not go back in response to that pull which was itself a fear.

All the rest of the week and the week following, then, I went out for my walk every day, and I several times glanced in at Vallombrosa, where I could not see that anything was changed—though I believe I did not look very closely. I still had my bad moments at night after the painful importunings of dreams and during stretches of those solitary strolls which had now become daily trails. But by the end of the second week I was imagining that the pressure was lighter. I had had two untormented nights, and I set out on Saturday afternoon with something like ease and indifference.

I walked first along a little back road that ran parallel with the regular motor-road on which the Terhune house faced—a road that lay back of their place with a neighbor's estate between them and it; then I turned down a hedge-lined lane that connected with the larger road, realizing as I did so that I had lately never taken these lanes. I heard something drive in behind me and drew over close to the hedge, but it was something that ran very lightly, and I did not at first look round. A horse stopped in front of me: I looked up and saw a lady in a varnished yellow phaeton, who seemed to be speaking to me. "Oh, how do you do," I replied with an instinctive familiarity that preceded conscious recognition. "You should have let us know you were coming today," she said as she reached down her gloved hand. She was slimmer and brisker and trimmer than when I had seen her before. She was wearing a tight dress of a brown-and-green plaid, with a beautiful hour-glass waist and no bustle or ruffle to encumber the skirt, and a pretty little straw bonnet, which was tied under her chin with a big green bow.

I got in at her invitation, as if it were a matter of course, and she drove on sitting up very straight between the gracefully scrolling wicker fenders and behind the slim long-lashed whip that stood upright in its socket. I was occupied for the first few minutes in fitting my story to my role: there was a passage in the conversation where we almost lost connections when I had to explain that I had walked instead of having them meet me at the train because I enjoyed walking, then found out that the train only stopped at a place eight or nine miles away: I was forced to confess, laughing nervously, that I had only been boasting before, that a farmer had brought me part way. And I did not notice at first that we were driving through a landscape that seemed totally new to me. We had turned out of the lane to the right through a gate I had not known was there, and now were trotting along a driveway which should have led to the house next-door to the Bristeads; but there was no house there; instead, the drive curved around through a wide expanse of lawn that was not anywhere broken by a hedge or a fence. We approached a new-looking yellow house and drew up under a porte-cochère. I realized suddenly and queerly that we were back at the Terhune house. I said that I hadn't known about this driveway that connected with the other road. "Yes: the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drive runs right through the place," she replied. I grasped that the place next door was still a part of the Bristead estate: the doctor would later sell it. I had entered into the domain of the Bristeads as soon as I had turned into the lane.

"I don't know why Jerry didn't see me," she said when she had waited hardly a second. "Would you mind going to the house and getting Rosa to call him?—I think he's getting very lax," she said as I climbed down. I walked into the house. Should I bolt? No, I couldn't. I passed resolutely through the hallway—conscious, as I passed the Hebe, that I did not give it a thought. But when I got to the door to the kitchen, I knew there would be nobody there. I opened it, however, and looked in. There were a big black coal-range with a stovepipe, a bare clean wooden floor, a double row of copper pots and pans hanging along the wall. I called out, "Hello . . . Rosa . . ."; but nobody answered. I ought now, I said to myself, to go out the back door to the stable; but I had a half-dreamlike instinct that I should not find anyone there either; and my sense that I was not going to go there was filled out by a voice from the hallway which told me that the coachman had come.

I joined her. She was taking off her bonnet. "Well, the styles in men's clothes astonish me," she said, as I took off my overcoat. "Is that really what they're wearing now?" "I'm perhaps a little eccentric," I said. "I get to town so seldom," she continued, as we went into the living-room, "that I don't know anything that's going on. And I believe that the young men I see are rather conservative about their clothes."

The atmosphere, I felt, was relaxed. The room seemed to be largely unchanged. There were the curtains, the grate with its coals, the tables with low-hanging covers, the ornaments on a whatnot in the corner. I noticed a large bronze gas chandelier with shades of pattern-frosted glass. I must have scrutinized these objects rather curiously because she glanced toward a group of swords and sabers, hung up in a design on the wall, at which she evidently thought I was looking, and exclaimed, "Those are oriental weapons. I don't think they have any place here—but Papa considers them decorative. I tell him he ought to build a small armoury.—Do sit down."

I questioned her for a moment about the various kinds of swords; but she wasn't quite sure what they were and was obviously impatient with them. There was something she wanted to get on to. "I should like to talk to you quite frankly about something," she began as soon as we were seated, "and I wish you would advise me frankly. You're the closest friend now that we have—though it's been such a long time since we've seen you." I was, then, an old family friend. "I have no brothers or uncles to turn to as most women have—I have nobody in the world but Papa, and you know how prejudiced he is about so many things, and how obstinately he sticks to his prejudices. I know that I can say that to you because you know that I love and admire him more than anyone else in the world—but—well, you know how sure he is about everything." I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nodded and smiled in concurrence. "Well, I'd like to put my problem before you—if you don't mind being plunged into family problems the very minute you arrive. I know it's not a very cheerful welcome, but I think that if I'm going to talk about it, I'd better do it before Papa gets back. You know that he doesn't give people much chance to express opinions different from his own.—Well, here is my problem quite baldly. A young man has asked me to marry him—" "And your father doesn't approve of him," I put in, a little more at ease in the new situation than I had been in the role of physician. "—And Papa doesn't approve of him at all. In fact, he's violently opposed to my marrying him—and you know how he is when he's opposed to anything. He's even making it difficult now for Fred to come to the house." The young man, then—I half-felt I had known it already—was Ellen's father, Fred Terhune, and this was Ellen's mother, younger than when I had seen her before and not yet decided about marrying him.

"Why does he object to this young man?" I asked. "It's simply that he's in Wall Street," she answered. "I think that his attitude is very unreasonable. The financiers have done so much for this country and it's ridiculous to pretend that they're not as good as our best—Mr. Morgan, for example, who has just as much taste as Papa and is making such a wonderful collection. It isn't as if he were in business! Fred's family are Terhune Brothers, the bankers, and his position is perfectly unexceptionable. I am sure that his character is sound. He was a little wild in his younger days, but now he wants a home and an ordered life. That's hard for Papa to understand, because Papa has always been occupied with intellectual things, and he can't understand that a man whom he regards as a mere man of fashion can be a proper person to marry. I really think he'd rather I married a musician—someone preferably who played the cello, so that we could have a family trio." I was aware of the prejudice against "business" on the part of the professional classes that had lasted in the United States till long after our national life had been actually dominated by business men; but this prejudice was not generally extended to bankers, and I put down the doctor's opposition to distrust of the particular young man or to some special and personal crankiness. But she went on to indicate another cause which I guessed to be fundamental. "Of course, I understand, too, that Papa has been lonely since Mama's death, and that he doesn't want to have me leave. But, after all, Papa has so many resources—his work and his music and his collections and his chess—and I can't go on like this forever. He doesn't understand that if I don't get married now, I may be left alone myself. And Fred needs me, too—he's told me so with all the feeling of which anyone is capable—and I can see that his bachelor life is beginning to do him harm.—Now please tell me frankly and sincerely what you think I ought to do. Shall I just go ahead and marry Fred in spite of Papa's opposition? I feel that he's perfectly capable of refusing to give me anything and never having anything to do

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with me again. But if I do as he wants, I'll feel that I'm betraying Fred's love and trust in me. Now how would you advise me to act?"

This, then, was an earlier turning-point, a moment to determine the future; and again there was the curious effort to thrust the decision on me.

This plea of Miss Bristead's, who I gathered was now in her lateish twenties, reminded me of Ellen's appeal at the time I had seen her in her girlhood, that I should put in a word with her grandfather to have her sent away to school. And I had now a very clear conviction of something that I had only felt without figuring to myself before: that Dr. Bristead was an egregious old egoist, selfish in his relations with his family and oppressive in his opinionated omnisicience. Ellen, too, would want to get away, and she would have sympathized with her mother. I sympathized with her, certainly, myself. Miss Bristead had a genuine distinction, she was handsome in her glamorless way; above all, as she leaned forward in her smart dress that reminded me of Ellen's plaid skirt when she had just come back from Paris, and threw out her very well-shaped hands that might have been reproduced in china for those vases that hold single flowers—above all, she was an eager young woman who wanted to escape from that house and marry an urgent suitor. Besides, there was a certain authority, a certain force of assertion that she commanded and to which I felt myself yielding. Why shouldn't she, I asked myself, be bored with ministering to her father's hobbies? Why shouldn't she want to live in the city? Why shouldn't she yearn for and why shouldn't she share in that codified social life for which she was obviously well adapted and of which her father had undoubtedly skimped her? Why shouldn't she marry Fred? He was doing no one any good in his present situation of man-about-town past his prime. He could at least give her an independent position, help her to found a family. It was as if I could not foresee the future.

"I dare say you ought to marry him," I replied to her request for advice. "I do wish you would tell Papa that!"—she was grateful to me for telling her to do the thing that she wanted to do at the same time that she must have been fairly sure that I should follow the lead she had given. "If anyone could persuade him, you could. I don't want to do anything without his consent—it would be so distressing for everybody!" "I'll try," I said, smiling.

She looked away toward the adjoining music-room, the door into which was open, but which I could not see from where I sat, as if she had just heard somebody enter it. Then she was turning to me again as if to go on talking when someone began to play the piano—ringing out, as I imagined at random, the Don Juan theme from Strauss, which had not been quite accurately remembered. Miss Bristead looked up as if uncertain how to deal with the situation; but the music went on consecutively, developing and playing with the theme. We saw that it was an organized piece. "Oh, yes: do play it, dear!"—she looked toward the music-room. "This is your new composition, isn't it? I want so very much to hear it!" She leaned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

over and said to me in a lowered voice, which was, however, hardly low enough: "Our guest is playing something of her own. I hope you don't mind. It may not be very wonderful, and I don't think the middle of the afternoon is the ideal time to listen to music, do you?—but I don't want to stop her now that she's started. I wasn't sure whether she'd be here this afternoon and I hope she won't be in your way."

I nodded and gestured with my hand so that she would be still and I could listen to the music. It was amusing and very adroit. The composer had taken an echo of the blare of the Don Juan theme and subjected it to all kinds of transformations. After stating it at first in its full exultation, she had gone on to break its pace and to reduce it to a wavering whimper. Against this appeared a steadier theme, sober, distinct and insistent, which began by going along with Don Juan in a fairly orderly manner but ended by getting at odds with him in a jagged amalgamation that seemed to be jamming the whole movement. Miss Bristead gave me a look of ironic disapproving amazement when these cacophonies began to sound. She had listened before that rather thoughtfully, as if she did not know quite how to take it, with her cheek leaned against her straight fingers and her face partly turned toward the door; but now as the music appeared to her to be getting more and more insane, she gave a little laugh in my direction as if it were supposed to be funny, then resumed this pensive attitude, politely and pleasantly smiling. Don Juan had the last word of the contest that went on in the music, but in a triumph that was frankly trashy. The whole thing had reminded me of Sigismund, who so loved to exploit the Strauss tone-poem, identifying himself with the hero and bringing down the house. "I don't *know* what you want to do to our ears," said Miss Bristead in the direction of the doorway. "That sounds as if it might be called *Cat on the Keyboard*—that little *divertissement.*"

There was no answer from the other room: after a moment the piano began again. Miss Bristead faintly raised her eyebrows at the pianist's bizarre rudeness and again became silent. And now, almost without astonishment, I recognized the slow movement of the sonata that Ellen had played me in August. I heard unmistakably that theme—that sullen immovable impediment—which had worried me so at the time and of which I had felt a premonition in the music of Ellen's youth. I looked up toward the door, and Miss Bristead shot me a glance and threw out her hands in a gesture of "I give it up!" How horrible Ellen's harmonies must sound to her mother, I reflected: they must be forty or fifty years beyond her. I smiled faintly and nodded curtly and thereafter kept clear of her eye. I listened to the music with interest. It was not now so thudding and stunning: she had found out now how to vary it so that one did not fear seriously any longer that the piece had simply stopped, and had yet kept the effect of monotony. Daring and disconcerting though it was, I saw that it would be ultimately successful. Certainly Ellen was an admirable musician!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When again there was a pause of a moment, Miss Bristead sat and looked at her lap. But quickly she returned to the charge: "I suppose," she said humorously to the doorway," that the first section represented Baby when he was just beginning to bang and that the second is called *Five-Finger Exercises*."

The piano picked up when the space had been made. I listened for this movement with excitement. It began with the theme of obstruction again, and, though this was now sharpened and speeded-up, I was at first rather disappointed. In a moment, I was almost terrified. The four-notes which had not let her move, now in their way became hysterically insistent. The thing seemed to be getting out of hand and began to sound absolutely hellish, a shrieking of desperation; and the horror of the nightmare came back on me. Miss Bristead got up and coughed slightly and went out through the door into the hall as if she had to speak to the maid but at the same time desired definitely to indicate that she was done with the music. I continued to listen, and there crept upon me a freezing apprehension like that of those days when I had dreaded to come to the house: the piano seemed to be carrying me, like the panic of my dreams, to some bad unintelligible goal. The awful accelerated movement had passed from the negative of inertia to a frenzied destructive denial. But now it met a new kind of theme which it seemed itself to have produced and which was lifted like the human cry in the slow movement of Beethoven's last string quartet, shuddering and terror-stricken at first as it shrilled from the sinister harping that was beginning to tear like a beast at a carcase, then rising to a plangency, to a clarity, that, passing the conventional limits of this sort of affirmation in music, began to assail one's attention more recklessly, more compellingly, more triumphantly, just as the diabolic yapping of the other theme, becoming fiercer and fiercer, had forced itself beyond all limits. This cry, itself now reiterated, not only wrecked the bounds of the conventional, it even seemed to escape from the probable—anguished, appealing, pitying, recognizing all human discrepancy, debasement, self-disgust and self-accusal of the individual who knows his own nature and who yet cannot undo what he is; but reaching by the voice of music out of the brooding of deformity in solitude to speak to other beings of their solitudes and of the universal human fate, declaring by its certainty of pain how much our nature wrongs us. The voice broke away: for that moment, becoming at once more complex and more ordered, it had been with a life of its own—something that shone and resounded and yet had a solid wholeness, something that had left all deformity behind and that nothing now could ever violate.

Miss Bristead came back into the room just as the final statement was struck, pulling up perhaps a little short of the development one might have expected and yet perfectly making its point. "That was immensely interesting!" she said to the person in the music-room. "It must be very exhausting playing such violent music." She sat down beside me on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

couch and remarked in her inadequately lowered voice: "I don't think our friend in the next room has discovered the use of the soft pedal yet—as well as a number of other things! . . . I don't think she's entirely normal—one can see it from her oversized head."

I realized then that it was not only in technique that Ellen's music was beyond Miss Bristead: musically trained though she was, she had no real feeling for music whatever. Ellen had been mistaken in her notion that her mother's marriage had shut her off from a musical career: Miss Bristead was conventional and worldly, she could not conceivably be anything else. And now Ellen, surmounting her own despair, had come back all the way through the years to justify her, to let her know her sympathy, to show her that something fine had come out of her, something that might make all that—the coldness, the sickness, the quarreling, the bad birth and the ugly changeling—something that might make all that right. I wanted to tell Ellen that she had triumphed, that she had written a great piece of music. I wanted to assure her, confronted as we were by her mother's Gorgon-like incomprehension, that I at least understood and applauded.

"I liked it very much," I said, and got up quickly and went into the music-room. But Ellen had already escaped. There was nobody there: I looked around. Everything seemed perfectly familiar, unexpectedly and yet reassuringly: the mask of Beethoven, the old violins, Ellen's silver-framed photograph of Debussy. But the room, rather queerly, was much darker than the one from which I had come.

I had an impulse to go after Ellen and call to her that I was there. I was eager to see her again. But I knew it would be better to return to Miss Bristead and ask her to make Ellen come in. I went back, then, into the living-room; but it was empty: Miss Bristead had gone out again. This room had darkened, too—the weather must suddenly have clouded. I turned on the electric lamp on the little round table by the couch, and saw that the mahogany of the surface was dimmed by a film of dust. There was a pile of current magazines, current for 1926. I picked two or three of them up and noted the dates on the covers. Then I looked about the room. There it was just as I had seen it in August. All the shades were drawn. I picked up from another table a vase of faded flowers and stirred up a foul stink: they were gladiolas withered to a crisp yellow thinness. The house had been shut up in a hurry: the gladiolas had been forgotten.

I found my hat and coat in the hall, but the big front door was fast locked. I came back to the living-room, opened one of the front windows, and stepped out on to the dark porch, where I saw that it was raining. I did not fear that Miss Bristead would come back—I knew there was nobody there.

The next day I read in the paper that Ellen Terhune was dead. She had gone, it turned out, to the city the night of my visit in August. She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had taken a little suite—registering under her maiden name—in a little old hotel in the West Fifties which was frequented by musical people and where you could have a piano in your room. She had apparently made efforts to compose during the first two or three weeks she was there; but later she would be found by the chambermaid lying on the couch or the bed in what seemed to be a kind of stupor, and the management became aware that she was never going out and not eating. They decided that she was suffering from the sleeping sickness and got a doctor in. But Ellen became piercingly wideawake, explained that she had come there for a rest and did not want to be annoyed, and sent the doctor about his business.

She now reassured them by directing that a breakfast with two pots of coffee should be brought to her every morning; and she was heard playing the piano again, pounding the same thing over and over in a way that made them fear she had gone crazy. At night she would go out into the town.

One day, however, she had not got up but had stayed in bed till afternoon, and the maid had not been able to do the rooms. It was the day of my last call in the country, and at what must have been just the hour when I was listening to the playing of the sonata, the maid heard the piano and went in. She had started work on the bedroom when Ellen stopped and came in and put on her things to go out. She was tense and her hands, which had been straining at the keys, could not adjust themselves to handling her hat and coat, and the chambermaid tried to help her; but Ellen paid no attention.

She went out quickly and rang for the elevator. On the way down, the elevator boy said, he had stopped and gone back up a floor to get a passenger who had rung after they passed, and Ellen had "bawled him out," telling him he must never go back once he had passed a floor. This had so flustered the boy, who was new and inexpert with the old-fashioned elevator, that he had made the situation worse by stopping below the door and then jerking the elevator up just as the passenger was stepping down. Then, in an effort to make up for his delay, on the assumption that Ellen was in a hurry, he had shot suddenly down in a drop which the passenger who had just entered said afterwards had given him an unpleasant shock. It must have shocked Ellen, too, for she was pale when they reached the bottom, and clung to the elevator door before she walked out. The boy was worried and tried to help her; but she stepped out by herself into the lobby, and there fell dead. It was said that she had a bad heart.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books

THE SPIRITUAL UNDERGROUND

The Seed Beneath The Snow. By Ignazio Silone. Harpers. $2.75.

Ignazio Silone invokes the Zeitgeist in all his works. Whereas most contemporary writers approach their subject matter by way of literary tradition, Silone has actually transposed into the dimensions of fiction the social and moral problems of the day. This is not to deny the resources of his talent, but his chief interest for us does lie, it seems to me, in the fact that he has given a literary status to the crises of our time.

What other novels have cut so deeply into the cross-currents of faith and scepticism that marked the deterioration of the socialist ideal? Even so spectacular a novelist as Malraux, operating within the same genre and with ostensibly the same subject as Silone, eventually became the prisoner of his earlier enthusiasms, with the result that his later characters merely raced over the surface of events. And how many other novelists mistook topical banalities for social realism? Silone's first book, *Fontamara*, was, to be sure, simply a very moving parable of suffering, rarely extending beyond the limits of class conflict; but it should be remembered that it appeared at the height of socialist élan, and it did satisfy the demand of the time for a more complete revolutionary personality in left-wing fiction. *Bread and Wine*, however, took as its starting point the conflict between belief and conscience in those disillusioned socialists who could no longer exorcise their scruples about power politics by the argument of expediency. Harried by this dilemma, Silone's revolutionary hero, Spina, attempted to recapture those ethical values he had found lacking in socialist practice—or was it socialist theory, too? His discovery of the Kingdom of Heaven at the close of the novel seemed at the time to be no more than a symbol of irresolution.

Now, in *The Seed beneath the Snow*, a spiritually and historically older Spina, completely stranded by the failures of the Left, sets out to rediscover the "truth," the irreducible facts, that is, of human existence, and to salvage from the wreckage of crushed lives and broken hopes man's natural, indestructible, moral self. The narrative, largely static, revolves chiefly about Spina's efforts to reestablish himself in his native community. All that seems to have remained of his Marxist philosophy is its ideal of brotherhood, which he conceives to be the rightful heritage of the momentarily beaten and shell-shocked peasantry. And in a counterpoint of moral and physical drives, Spina spreads the gospel of his inner life at the same time that he moves about the countryside hiding from the police.

At first, Spina tests his new faith in a series of dialogues with his grandmother, who is a noble vestige of Christian good will. Gradually

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he feels his way toward a spiritual rapport with those "little people," whose friendliness and rural wisdom he regards as the real humanist underground in fascist Italy. And, carrying these symbols of renewal and renunciation to the end, Spina purges himself of his doctrinal burdens through the sacrificial act of giving himself up to the police to save his friend Infante, a truly Rousseauan figure of the earth. Thus Silone, ever uneasy about the uses to which the revolutionary intelligence has been put, has finally dissolved it in a primitive Christianity of suffering and good deeds.

Naturally, Silone has been berated by the more orthodox Left for subjecting "social problems to a purely moral analysis." And, from a strictly logical point of view, it is true that Silone's moral optimism, based on a bit-by-bit restitution of the human essence, can scarcely be considered a program for revitalizing the socialist movement. Nor are we convinced by Silone's reply to his critics (in a recent issue of *The New Republic*), that since the failure of socialism is moral rather than material, our great task is that of spiritual purification. For this is merely a religious paraphrase of those democratic, humanist, aims to which every socialist who has taken stock of recent events is committed. The fact is that the socialist movement is little more than an organized memory of its past hopes; and while the sheer hypnotic repetition of classic doctrine certainly dooms it to complete inertia, Silone's exercise of the moral imagination cannot be said to be any more fruitful. It contains no positive historical meaning. True enough, Silone has held on to his socialist faith, but the trouble is that it lacks the will to action.

If we cannot warm up to Silone's spiritual vision, it is not because we have at hand a more acceptable solution. In this sense, Silone has actually put the mirror once more to those radical intellectuals who have largely given up Marxism as a system of thinking, yet still cling to its optimism of progress. What we balk at is the installation of such tribal deities as nature, essential goodness, homely wisdom as the new motive forces of history, with the inevitable substitution of religious instinct for social intelligence.

And it is this moral schematism, it seems to me, that is responsible for the weaknesses of the novel. I do not mean to discount those superior qualities of irony that are to be found here as well as in his earlier work, nor the unusual charm and folk-pathos that is given to the sullen, homespun characters. His sketches of the village functionaries are masterful: these bewildered, pompous creatures drift from scene to scene, vying with each other in "oratory," that odd mixture of rationalization and nonsense that has become a national profession, partly to baffle the common peasantry, partly to stiffen their own self-esteem. But, on the whole, the novel cannot hold the weight of its allegory. Too little happens outside of Spina's spiritual excursions. Hence it is talky, lacking in dramatic clash and suspense. And Silone's moral fervor produces a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cloying, hygienic atmosphere, with the right people doing the right things, as, for example, Spina's rectitude in his relation with his lover, Faustina, because he believes her to be the mistress of a friend. Similarly, the literal execution of the symbolism of good and evil leads to such ingenuous, idyllic scenes as that in Simone's hut, where Spina, the deaf-and-dumb Infante, the old, loyal, Simone, a worn out donkey, and a starved dog—all warm themselves over the fires of mutual trust and friendship.

As a result, Silone's basically tragic theme is lost in the vagaries of the good life. There is no struggle to speak of within Spina, while the conflict between him and the brute forces of fascist society is really more picaresque than tragic. Nor does the denouement strike us as anything but foolish heroics, for Spina's giving himself up to the police is too accidental to suggest any tragic inexorability. And, surely, Silone did not mean to imply that the hope of man is to be found in the bruised psyche of the half-conscious Infante?

Silone's difficulty—there were signs of it in *Bread and Wine*—lies, I think, in his attempt to project his own conflicts into one of the most backward regions imaginable. For once the crisis of belief is removed from the consciousness that produced it, it loses its psychological as well as its social meaning. How can one expect to reproduce the tensions of moral or intellectual frustration in the almost instinctual life of the oppressed Italian village? As a matter of fact, Silone has not even attempted to do, and this I take to be the real failure of the novel, for the resolution of Silone's problem has actually been made prior to the development of the novel. The characters merely re-enact the religious synthesis Silone has reached: Spina, with some awareness, the others, blindly.

From a creative point of view, there is some aptness in the fact that Silone's new faith is given fictional representation in the ingrown, dreamy life of the peasantry. Practically speaking, Silone's philosophy reduces itself in the course of the novel to a kind of itinerant preaching, and the still uncorrupted, credulous folk of the Italian provinces form for Spina an almost inexhaustable supply of saveable souls. But, at the same time, it seems to me that Silone's seemingly obsessive interest in rural life explains, in large measure, his religious turn. For one thing, the dispersed and elemental nature of peasant existence has always made it a breeding ground for every conceivable variety of mystification. And it is evident that for Silone immersion in the pieties of the country actually amounts to a repudiation of city culture. His present distrust—understandable, to be sure—of social theories has been cast in the image of peasant stoicism. If one looks behind Silone's new faith, one can discern the immemorial passivity of the village, with its instinctive faith in the great mysteries of life and death and salvation.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Blood for a Stranger. By Randall Jarrell. Harcourt, Brace. $2.00.
The Second World. By R. P. Blackmur. The Cummington Press. $2.50.
Lyra: An Anthology of New Lyric. Edited by Alex Comfort & Robert Greacen. The Grey Walls Press, Billericay, Essex. 5/-.
Three New Poets. By Roy McFadden, Alex Comfort & Iran Serraillier. The Grey Walls Press. 2/6.
Ruins and Visions. By Stephen Spender. Random House. $2.00.

Randell Jarrell has the talents, the sensitivity, the wisdom and almost everything else that the good fairy can give. He is one of the most intelligent persons writing English at the moment. There is some very profound poetry in this book of his, in the literal sense of that word. But like Fred Astaire, another very gifted American, he seems to have a blank personality. He is swallowed up by his gifts. His writing, critical and poetic, for all its brilliance, lacks a core. I think it is an American middle-class failing—in which we as the most rationalized human products of industrialism come close to the insect kingdom—to be too much at the disposal of our respective trades and in the face of vocational training not to maintain enough the claims of what only seems extraneous. This is quite different from craftsman's humility, which lies in subordinating personal interests to the object being created, not in surrendering the totality of oneself to a professional role. You give up being a friend, a lover, a gossip, an attractive person, the life of the party, in order to be that much more poet, actor, boxer, doctor, businessman. Instead of completing yourself by work you mutilate yourself. (In their impatience with all this, some American writers—Miller, Saroyan, Patchen—go to the opposite extreme and distend themselves by swallowing their professional roles in their personalities.) And for relaxation there is shop-talk; which led Henry James to complain that he could get no material for his art from "down town" New York, from the masculine world of work, that it was to be found only among women in this country.

As discerned through his writing, Jarrell seems to be too much writer and too little anything else. Certainly he writes about himself a good deal, but it is as the abstraction of himself, as fuel for poetry, himself converted into something that has no further relation to himself except as professional poet. The paradox is that he appears to be very conscious of the problem—which is one reason, perhaps, for the conspicuousness of his shortcomings with respect to it. But more fundamental is his lack of temperament; and temperament alone, in the absence of everything else, suffices to give a center, a direction and unity to an individual's work. For lack of it, Jarrell is too easily distracted, is provoked by his own fluency, is at the mercy of every idea that strikes him. Although his single poems are naturally less open to this than his poetry as a whole, even within them the reader is sometimes exasperated by sudden, unjustifiable changes of direction from stanza to stanza and line to line. Add Jarrell's unimmediate, unsigned style, through which other poetry, notably Auden's and Yeats's, seems to have been strained and deprived

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of savor, and the unity of which is given only negatively by the absence of a personal sensibility—add all this to the poet's uncertain ear, and it becomes inevitable that his book of poems should as a whole be hard reading in spite of its many single excellences. Is it that Jarrell assents to his faculty for making even the most concrete, vivid words—of which *blood* is perhaps the least vivid example—take on an abstract flavor, because this gives words greater potentialities of connection, like oxygen atoms? Is it that blood donated for strangers should have only the most general properties of blood, because then it can be transfused into anybody's veins regardless of blood-type? Maybe so, maybe Jarrell is on the way to a great kind of abstract poetry. There are some very good abstract poems in his book. But personal wisdom—wisdom about oneself and one's relation to others—out of which more than anything else Jarrell strives in his plight to realize his most ambitious poetry, needs for that to be fortified by much more substantial hints as to the problems offered by the poet's own specific personality. For the rest, Jarrell has understood his own case in concept. "The Winter's Tale" is a poem about those "Who made virtue and poetry and understanding/ The prohibited reserves of the expert, of workers/ Specialized as the ant-soldier . . ." and about "The substitutes of the geometer for existence."

R. P. Blackmur has improved considerably as a poet, but his personality is almost as blank as Randall Jarrell's, and he is much more a victim of good taste. If Jarrell is without savor, Blackmur is without flavor. His poems have no foreground existence, but transpire backstage behind a gauze of literature and Yeats. But his style does have its academic distinction in spite of the mechanical and monotonous regularity with which he divides lines; and four of the nine poems in this thin book are quite successful in their Yeatsian way (repeating also the Yeatsian themes of youth and age): "The Second World," "Missa Vocis," "For Comfort and For Size" and "The Dead Ride Fast." Yet I suspect Blackmur's good poems of having the same relation to genuinely good poems that waxen images have to living beings: they only look the same, the animating principle is missing. It is very difficult for contemporaries to point out just wherein it is missing, for Blackmur is too sophisticated a literary man not to be able to conduct himself in faultless accordance with the best taste and usage of the time. But now and then the orifice through which the soul escapes the body can be detected:

"There is disorder, like heavy breathing in the next room,
Like people making way when no one comes."

All the appurtenances of good poetry are here, but they are only appurtenances: "heavy breathing in the next room" and "making way when no one comes" obnubilate the disorder, are falsely portentous. Blackmur is after the intensity of pure poetry, but he contrives it instead of creating it out of a necessity in himself other than his ambition as a poet.

One generation of English poets now follows hard on the heels of another, the members of this latest one likewise closing ranks to form

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a mutual admiration society, but even more vocal and more aggressive against opposition. What an amount of back-slapping and acclaiming goes on among them! Meanwhile it is mostly to the good, for young writers are more helped than hindered by mutual admiration. *Lyra* anthologizes the work of what looks to be their important majority. Abandoning the positions won by Auden's so-called classicist movement, they are in retreat towards a purer and more personal poetry, are all for neater verse, traditional simplicities, descriptions, emotions in the presence of nature, intimate events and their own love affairs—hetero-sexual at last. In divesting themselves of the conventions of modernism in order to attain a more naked honesty, some of them have not only become "new romantics," but have often mistaken for no conventions at all any ante-dating Eliot:

> "Kiss me before all breaks. Let me touch your dress.
> If we must die, then let it be of love,
> And set the whole world trembling as we kiss."

But whether their poetry is good or bad, and for all their easy sentiment, their know-nothingism and their reversionary aesthetics, these young poets are serious in a way their American contemporaries too frequently are not. For them poetry is not quite so exclusively a trade or profession, but also a means of completing and realizing themselves. They may in some instances be even greater careerists than their American fellows, but they are concerned with their poetry as persons, not just as writers; they try to connect it with everything else about which they are concerned; they are superior to literature in that at least they seem interested in more than achieving it; they want from their own work satisfactions beyond those of success. In their resolve to be sincere they are not afraid to write naively and unfashionably. As a result their verse, regardless of its quality, manages to have a great amount of existence (Spinoza notwithstanding). It may be little, but it is not tenuous poetry. Not even Francis Scarfe's three howling lines above.

Unlike some English poets of the preceding generation, a good many of those in *Lyra* are better than they appear to be. However, the best of them are very uneven, to judge from evidence in other publications besides this one. Perhaps they think that honesty requires the publication of their worst as well as their finest poems. G. S. Fraser, poised and quietly powerful, is the least uneven of the lot, and perhaps the best, though he has not the occasional brilliance of some of the others. Nicholas Moore, whose "Little Black Box" is one of the most original poems of our age, doing better in twenty-nine lines what otherwise only a novel can do, is quite bad when he is not good. Henry Treece alternates between flashes of fire and splashes of water. Wrey Gardiner, Charles Davey and especially Emanuel Litvinoff are promising. Right now I should say that Anne Ridler is the most consistently successful and original of the poets in the book, though she seems rather limited. Like not a few poetesses since Emily Dickinson, she deliberately bends her verse towards prose

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by suppressing the beat. As for the rest of the anthology, some is fair, some is mediocre, and quite a lot is bad. Exception should be made for Alex Comfort, who along with the other two of *Three New Poets* is also represented in *Lyra*. Comfort has the self-confidence and the sense of what he can and cannot do that usually belongs only to older poets. He creates superb sound effects, and elegiac gravity, the prevailing tone of so much poetry nowadays, receives new shading in his verse:

"Strange that in me the shadow
moving the substance speaks: strange that such air
pulls the blue sinew, whom the blood maintains
whom the heart's coming slight defection
shall spill, speaks now and holds
time like a permanent stone, its cold weight judging."

This is the materialist (the poet is a medical student) approaching from a new direction. No virtuoso of punch lines, Comfort, like Moore, Litvinoff and lately Spender, depends for effect on the total unfurling of the poem. He has a good chance of becoming a large and serious writer. Roy McFadden's poetry is slight, and has little beyond its honesty and grace. Honesty is always rewarded in some measure, and McFadden does get off a good passage now and then. Ian Serraillier is also honest, and has a certain originality of language and versification, but he seems even slighter than McFadden because he restricts his subject-matter more. He has a timidity about going beyond the sense-world; within it he describes well:

"And the clouds that pace restless over Llewelyn,
for ever racing but for ever still
like runners painted on a vase, shall hold
their strange stationary course until,
time and the mountains melting, they from the sun
drop to the level world and freely run."

To have shown that it is still possible to write convincingly such nice derivative verse is a kind of triumph, and these young Englishmen are certainly increasing poetry, yet the tendency they embody is regrettable in so much as it surrenders too many positions and goes back too far in the sole endeavor to be honest. These poets are not ambitious enough. They avoid the most difficult, which is usually the most important. If they insist on poetry's being pure again, can they not proceed beyond Auden, instead of short of him, and try, as perhaps Barker is doing, to conquer for pure poetry the areas which the previous generation opened up in its flight from it? Their disillusionment with socialist revivalism and everything else public is not excuse enough for the kind of obscurantism into which these poets fall. Most of their American contemporaries are at least willing to know more then they do. Herbert Read's preface to *Lyra* forms a reply possibly to these objections. He terms these new poets "pacifists in the *poetic* sense," and asserts that the reconstruction they are undertaking requires their poetry to be "projected

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away from the immediate struggle into the new world which has to be created out of the ruins of our civilization." And he also says, "By the end of the Spanish Civil War, the poetry of action had fought in the last ditch." Well, in the face of those two threatening phrases, "poetry of action" and "war poetry," I still insist on countering with *little poetry.*

Having made my objections, let me say that I share the premonitions of a poetic renaissance which Herbert Read gets from the work of these new English poets. Much talent is abroad among them, talent enough to defy all remonstrances.

On the strength of this second collection of his poems to be published in this country Stephen Spender is already a great poet. At least ten to twelve of his lyrics will not be forgotten, among them in this book "Exiles From Their Land, History Their Domicile," "The Past Values," "Darkness and Light," "The Human Situation," "The Double Shame," "A Wild Race," "Winter and Summer," "In a Garden," "The Ambitious Son"—and there are some others as great or almost as great.

Since his first book Spender has become less measured and poised, although he has taken more to rhyme, assonance and set forms. He is much closer to the *Lyra* poets than either he or they seem to recognize. In his "Foreword" he says: "The violence of the times we are living in, the necessity of sweeping and general and immediate action, tend to dwarf the experience of the individual, and to make his immediate environment and occupations perhaps something that he is even ashamed of. For this reason, in my most recent poems, I have deliberately turned back to a kind of writing which is more personal, and I have included within my subjects weakness and fantasy and illusion." (I tend to doubt the deliberateness of this turning.) Spender's work is uneven for the same reason that operates in the case of Moore, Comfort and the others: the determination to write as one must rather than as one would, and to publish all. With respect to Spender it could be wished though, that there was a little less sincerity and a little more honesty. So much of his latest poetry being a personal confession, Spender's excess of sincerity is to state not only the weaknesses on which he has acted, but also the strengths—or rather powers of feeling—on which he did not act. (But you are what you do and not altogether what you feel and know.) It makes a lot of his poetry *pleurnicherie,* exhibitionist self-pity, inflated pathos; especially when he interrupts himself to cry "I too am moved by this!"—as if he would be writing a poem if he wasn't. Many otherwise successful poems are spoiled by over-intimacy, usually towards their close. Also, Spender is seduced by his own eloquence, by his grace and ease of language, into repetition, wordiness and obscurity. His knack—and gift—like Rilke's, of protracting images sometimes runs away with him, and leads him, like Shelley, from the definite to the vague instead of the other way about, too often ending up among flowers, suns and summers, or else snow and ice.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet Spender's great poems redeem any number of his bad ones, and the very process of introspection and surrender to himself which occasions his failures is the same one which, pushed a step further, turns out lyrics of an intensity and of such intimate yet universal truth as no one except Yeats has lately equalled, and which like the latter's seem past all style and manner. Some are constructed from but an image, others have the rigorous articulation of a theorem. Spender's own shortcomings are turned to account, there being set up a beautiful contrast between his softness as a person and his anonymous toughness as an expert, utterly serious poet. He goes beyond solipsism and self-indulgence to discover himself as he exists in the medium of his art; and the very reluctance with which he reduces his enormous demands upon language as self-expression helps produce the great verse.

Ambitious Spender, in spite of his own disavowal, is an eminent type of the poet who strains for completeness. He tries to make as much of the world as he can relevant in his poetry, wanting to include history, politics, even economics; but only after he has passed them through himself and made them personal. Perhaps he insists too much on the personal. There is more poetry to be discovered now in the forces which produced Napoleon than in his own soul, and Spender's poem on Napoleon is bad, even though it is moving—and most of Spender's bad poems are moving, which only increases the momentary irritation—because he makes Napoleon an avatar of himself. Spender as teacher of history is in a false position; but so have been more than one important contemporary poet: Eliot as legislator, Yeats as nationalist agitator, Auden as theologian. It is almost a sign of their importance as poets. Nothing characterizes the unimportant poet today as much as his willingness to stay inside his professional role.

CLEMENT GREENBERG

BUTTON, BUTTON

The Company She Keeps. By Mary McCarthy. Simon and Schuster. $2.50.

The Company She Keeps is a shrewd, witty, malicious, original, and often brilliantly written book, which is called "a novel in six parts," but which might more accurately be called a heroine in six parts. Miss McCarthy states the theme in the Foreword: " 'When did you have it last?' the author adjures the distracted heroine, who is fumbling in her spiritual pocketbook for a missing object, for the ordinary indispensable self that has somehow got mislaid." The problem of the book is to put the Humpty-Dumpty back together again, to assemble the six selves of the heroine, Margaret Sargent, to define the true Florimel in the midst of the imposters.

In Part I, we see the self of the heroine as she moves through an "extramarital courtship." The deceptions necessary afford an opportunity for the exercise of the heroine's dramatic capacity, in which she delights. But the very self she plays, is a divided self. She "loves" her husband, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she "got no fun, she told The Young Man, out of putting horns on her darling's head. . . ." When she finally tells her husband that she is to leave him, she discovers the real climax of their relationship. After this she must act out the pattern, moving through it under the twin pressures of society's expectations and her own not understood compulsions.

The next four sections come, from different angles, at the problem laid down in Part I. In Part II, Margaret Sargent works as a secretary to a shady art dealer, a Mr. Sheer, who is full of tricks and disguises. It is not the story of Mr. Sheer's rise which is the subject of this section, but his peculiarly ambivalent attitude toward success; he is, in an oblique fashion, a sort of alter ego to the heroine. Or perhaps more accurately, Mr. Sheer's problem is a variation of the heroine's problem. Part III presents the Pullman romance of the heroine with a minor capitalist, "the man in the Brooks Brothers shirt," to whom she dramatizes herself as the bohemian radical, but from whom, also, she expects some definition of herself. But the man in the Brooks Brothers shirt has his own problems of definition. Part IV shows her as a guest at a party of the "genial host," a man who loves to bring people together, who has, as it were, no self except the fragments of selves he can pilfer from others. Part V, "Portrait of the Intellectual as a Yale Man," shows the effect of Margaret Sargent, violent Trotskyist, on the "intellectual." Her incorruptible, logical, coherent, fearless political self is set over against his confusion, a confusion resulting from the struggle between his two selves—the self of an editor of *The Liberal* and the self of the "Yale man."

In Part VI, we see her, now the wife of a successful architect, lying on the couch in the office of a psychoanalyst, who has defined a kind of unity of self for her, who interprets her present condition in terms of childhood conflict and estrangement. But she cannot accept this easy way to unity: "Oh my God . . . do not let them take this away from me. If the flesh must be blind, let the spirit see. Preserve me in disunity." So, by her repudiation, the Self defined by the psychoanalyst becomes simply another self.

The repudiation would imply that the resolution of the book is not intended in merely clinical terms. And if the resolution had been attempted in such terms, it would scarcely be acceptable. For the clinical case, as *pure* case (action reduced to automatism, the factors of character's choice and of author's judgment upon such choice removed), can scarcely be of fictional interest except in so far as the clinical case achieves a symbolic extension into contexts which, though perhaps involving the factors which make choice and judgment impossible in the clinical case, permit a margin of choice and judgment. (One might cite *The Magic Mountain, The American Tragedy* or certain items from the so-called decadent Jacobean tragedy as involving examples of such symbolic extension.) In other words, Margaret Sargent, when she prays to be preserved in disunity, is praying that she may not become an automaton, no matter how well "adjusted." She is praying to keep, even though ruinously, the disunity as a symbol of poten-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tial decision; that is, the idea that a decision is possible is necessary if one is to be human ("merely human," for the last words of the book are: "she did not believe in God") even though the price paid for holding that idea may be destruction. The conclusion then would seem to be a somewhat more modest version of the lines,

> O God of our flesh, return us to your wrath,
> Let us be evil could we enter in
> Your grace, and fatten on the stony path!

But perhaps this interpretation does not reckon with the Foreword: "For the search is not conclusive: there is no deciding which of these personalities is the 'real' one; the home address of the self, like that of the soul, is not to be found in the book." But how serious, or how coy, is this disclaimer? At what level are we to take it? Does it merely apply to Margaret Sargent, the "case," or are we to take it in its extensions? But can it be said to apply to the Margaret Sargent who speaks the last lines of the book? For if that Margaret Sargent asks to be preserved in disunity, she is affirming the value of the quest for "moral identity," and if there is a "quest" there must be a "quester." And this quester is another self presumably, different from the six selves previously described—a kind of Over-self, should one say, who survives all the transformations and masks. If the book does not give the address of this self, it seems, as has been indicated a paragraph back, to express, nevertheless, some faith in its existence. But the Foreword may be denying faith in the existence of that self—or is it?—who, after all, may be taken to be the leading, though un-named, character in this novel, as in all novels. There seems to be some difficulty here in resolving an irony, an ambiguity.

Perhaps if this leading character had been named, the book would have had a greater degree of unity in the ordinary fictional sense. But if that leading character had been named, the irony implicit in the method might have appeared more edged, more central. As matters stand, it may be that the basic unity is one of tone—a dry, analytical, satirical tone which is maintained with rarely flagging expertness from beginning to end. The satire, the analysis, is applied impartially to the heroine and to the various worlds through which she passes—the world of Mr. Sheer, of the man in the Brooks Brothers shirt, of the genial host, of the intellectual as Yale man, of the psychoanalyst. Those worlds are left in tatters, and the reader is certainly inclined to say, "And a damned good thing, too." But on second thought the reader may be inclined, without surrendering any of his satisfaction in the destruction accomplished, to ask a question about the origin of the blast which did the job. What are the premises of the satire? What are the standards implicit here? Does the satire originate merely from a lively distaste for fraud and imposture? If so, by what norms are these to be determined? Or does it originate from a vigorous appetite for breakage? Does one have a sense of the terms on which the author would pick up the pieces and put them back together again? Perhaps here the reader is left with the sense of an ambiguity similar to that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which may be felt about the resolution of the problem of the book. And perhaps the two ambiguities are not unrelated to each other.

I do not wish to conclude this comment on *The Company She Keeps* without saying that I admired and enjoyed the book. If I have been inclined to ask questions of the book, I wish this fact to be taken as an index to the basic seriousness and value which I believe is in Miss McCarthy's work. And I hope that the questions have been worthy of the book.

ROBERT PENN WARREN

MISS RUKEYSER'S MARINE POEM

Wake Island. By Muriel Rukeyser. Doubleday, Doran. $1.00.

There's one thing you can say about Muriel: she's not lazy.

WELDON KEES

PORTRAIT OF AN HISTORIAN

As Lord Acton Says. By F. E. Lally. Remington Ward, $3.00.

What makes a great Historian? Readers and writers of history would probably agree that the qualities of greatness embrace (1) style, (2) scholarship, (3) thesis. Certainly it is style which has put the stamp of a classic on Edward Gibbon's celebrated *Decline and Fall;* his research was eclectic, his argument overwhelmingly rationalistic in bias; but having "shrunk with terror from the modern history of England", as he confessed, Gibbon embraced "a safer theme", and found that "middle tone, the genuine style" which he somehow knew would give him historic importance. Again, of a work like Charles Beard's memorable *Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* it is undeniably its sharp and provocative thesis which has made it an intellectual monument; its writing is plain, matter-of-fact, its scholarship consisted largely of the glossing of known texts (aided by lucky discoveries among Washington garbage of original Founding Father papers). And what gives distinction to a performance like M. I. Rostovtzev's formidable study of *The Roman Empire* is not its style or thesis (it can hardly be said to have much of either), but its simply remarkable reconstruction of the past in all its vital detail from hitherto mute historical sources, sticks and stones and bones.

The case of Lord Acton is something else again. Here is a strange and brilliant man, with a still stranger career—for here is an indisputably great historian who never wrote a book! When, after Acton's death in 1902 (which cut short his editing of the *Cambridge Modern History*), a critic wandered into his amazing library, now a kind of museum piece in Cambridge, he found hundreds of shelves of English, Irish, Scottish, German, French and Russian history, Italian manuscripts, Greek and Latin classics, Church documents and Pipe Rolls, all with annotations indicating a colossal industry, and for him it was "the most pathetic sight of wasted labour that ever met human eyes", a monument to lost learning. Acton,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it is true, wrote nothing which can be called a book; innumerable essays and reviews, yes, but not a single volume of his own. "He won an immense reputation," ran one flippant obituary, "by doing nothing". Yet Acton *lived*—and by force of personality and drama of intellectual life achieved for himself a curious historical greatness.

Acton is indeed a complex and difficult figure—a liberal and yet not a democrat, a Catholic and yet not an authoritarian, a 19th Century Englishman yet not a narrow nationalist and provincial but a truly cosmopolitan scholar. Mr. Lally's book, I am afraid, does not help us very much, but we must in all truth be grateful for a complete bibliography, and for some biographical details not available in such standard sketches as G. P. Gooch's (in *History and Historians*) or in those brief popular portraits which merely fill in around his famous aphorism about power corrupting and absolute power corrupting absolutely. Acton was an Englishman, born in Italy, of a German mother, and educated in Rome, Berne, Paris and Munich. Unlike most scientific historians, he had a lively career as a journalist; and his weekly pieces were all characteristically informed by his deep knowledge and play of mind. The Vatican, unfortunately, put an end to that. The Church censured him, suppressed him, continually tripped him up, and each time, of course, Acton picked himself up off the floor, obsequious and apologetic. It is a shameful story, and one of the key controversies in the ultimate victory of the Popes (Pius IX, Leo XIII, Pius X) over the modern-minded religious avant-garde, inaugurating Neo-scholasticism. The Pope, in fact, was probably the villain in the story of Acton's sterility, a loss to historical literature more regrettable in many ways than the void of the lost books of Livy or Polybius.

It was in 1880 that Acton started his encyclopedic, 50,000 page history of liberty, his exhaustive treatise on human freedom. Suddenly, dramatically, after four solid years of work, he abandoned the project, never to return or speak of it. Why? The mystery has prompted many theories and hypotheses. Some say that he couldn't understand the French Revolution, and its historical intricacies broke his intellectual spirit. Others that he was depressed by his discovery that the writing of a universal history of freedom for the greatest part "would be a history of the thing that was not!" Still others that Acton was caught in the morass of his own infinite scholarship, his incessant note-taking and cross-referencing and sticking endless slips of paper into innumerable books and files of pigeon-holes, cabinets, compartments and big black boxes. Arnold Toynbee argues that it was the misapplied industrial ideals of the exploitation of raw materials and the division of labor that paralyzed his individual creative effort and turned him to collaborative writing: "The association of his name with the Cambridge Modern History is an enduring monument to Industrialism's victory over an historian of heroic build." But the most convincing explanation involves the Church. Not that Acton was an innocent, or a pliant tool. He showed a fine kind of independence as an Oppo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sitionist, fighting hard for years to stop the affirmation of the Doctrine of Papal Infallibility, although with the Vatican decree of 1870 he failed utterly. Acton was indeed a man attached to "the true scientific spirit and the disinterested love of truth", but he was also a devout Catholic with a peculiar loyalty to the Vatican. And his work, heading as it was right square for the top place on the Catholic Index, would probably (and he no doubt felt this deeply) have ripped apart the Roman Church in England. Acton's was simply a case of intellectual suicide.

It is this pathetic contradiction which makes Acton so interesting, and even exciting, an historian. If Acton found "no thread through history except the idea of progress towards more perfect and assured freedom and the divine right of free men", he also found the persecution of the Inquisition "a true and effective guardian of the morality of the people" (with a logic reminiscent of modern apologists for purge-minded totalitarianisms). If he subscribed to the idea that "truth is the only merit that gives dignity and worth to history" he subscribed too to the vicious Catholic myths of the happy Middle Ages and the satanic, evil Reformation. The pages of his collected writings are, to be sure, crowded with shrewd, wise and realistic historical comment. Acton observed the machine-like character of the state, which was "not fitted on society like a glove, but rather compressing it, like a thumbscrew, not growing out of society, like its skin, but put on it from without, like a mould into which society is forced to pour itself", even going on to say, "But clearly the state could never grow out of society as its expression and fruit, unless society were organized and distributed into distinct classes and corporations"; the idea of supermen and hero-worship he hated, and Carlyle was for him "the most detestable of historians"; and of "ruling and leading spirits" he remarked sharply, "the better we know them, the worse they appear". But by and large the historian who reacted so violently against the social-equalitarian tradition of the French Revolution, and who believed that "the possessors of better knowledge will always have to contend against the ignorant masses of mankind" has been lost in the shuffling advances of modern social theory and science.

What remains, however, of Lord Acton is his magnificent vision of History. The study of historical art and science was for him a kind of spiritual process, the basis of all real insight into the present, a school and guide to life: "to perfect his mind and open windows in every direction, to raise him to the level of his age so that he may know the forces that had made our world what it is and still reign over it, to guard against surprises and the constant sources of error within, to give force and fullness and clearness and sincerity and independence and elevation and generosity and serenity to his mind, that he may know the method and law of the process by which error is conquered and truth is won . . ." And more than that, what also remains is a vivifying spectacle of a great scholar in action. It used to be said of him that however much you knew about anything Acton was certain to know more. A colleague claimed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that "to be with Acton was like being with the cultivated mind of Europe." When he would speak of his history of freedom, as James Bryce testifies, "it was as if the whole landscape of history had been suddenly lit up by a burst of sunlight". And Gooch has gone so far as to say of him that very few moderns indeed "came so near mastering the whole range of human knowledge". If (as the frontispiece quotation from Euripides has it) "blessed are those who comprehend the instruction of history", no less "blessed" surely are those who comprehend the instruction of historians, and in Lord Acton's biography there are lessons for all.

MELVIN J. LASKY

Letters

LETTER FROM THE ARMY

Dear Editors:

I am now studying at the Link Trainer School, the hardest goddam school in the Army Air Force Technical Training Command, and have at the most one hour of leisure out of a day beginning at 4.00 A.M. and ending at 9:00 P.M.

I am delighted beyond measure with the Air Corps and am happier than I've been for years. What most impresses me about the Army, and particularly the Air Force, is the extreme pains they take to find out the work you are best fitted for, and the intelligent and considerate approach they take to the problem of preparing you for that work.

Another revelation is the extreme decency, charm, and comradeliness (is there such a word?) of the average soldier. Among themselves, soldiers are courteous and considerate to a remarkable degree. If you want to lie on your bunk and read Shakespeare, your neighbors try not to disturb you or else start up a discussion about the character of Macbeth. My barracks is teeming with arguments over pragmatism, Richard Strauss, and whom did Mary Queen of Scots really love. We very decidedly do not discuss politics, the national scene, or the international scene; in other words, in my experience, the average soldier is absolutely lacking in political consciousness. Neither does he have any conception of what the war is about or what we are fighting for. His attitude is quite simply that we must lick the Axis, and we're the guys who have to do it, so let's be for doing it. We cheer and boo at the right places in pep talks (I've heard two in two months), but the atmosphere is very much that of a high school football pep talk. Morale, on the other hand, to use a word I heartily dislike, is very high indeed, at least in the Air Corps. We gripe at every opportunity, but underneath we're so goddam proud of being in the Air Corps we could burst.

Yours,

EX-CONTRIBUTOR

CHANUTE FIELD, ILL.

ON THE LAST ISSUE

Sirs:

This particular issue prompts me to write you, to come out of anonymity, as it were. Your prose is always of the highest order and were it only that, I'd have nothing to say. In passing, though, I thought Serge simple and intelligent and quite the right antidote to Max Eastman, Inc. Silone is always a deep pleasure. I could not understand Maritain and so I thank Rosenberg for his clarified opposition which caused me to see the implications of Maritain's piece. (Could it have been a bad, that is clever, translation?)

It is the poetry that prompts me to write what must be, somehow, meaningless paper to you. For the first time I thought each poem good (three poems, three good ones). You have always been uneven there, and so one was tempted not to have faith in your poetry judgment. This issue's poetry makes me think that perhaps the mss. received aren't always the best. But Breit's The *Son of God* is a courageous, terrible and wonderfully moving poem. It is by far one of the best things I've seen.

Yours,

JOSEPH MCGREW

LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ERRATA

Sirs:

It is always a pleasure to receive PARTISAN REVIEW, and refreshing reading in these days. Your periodical is becoming a favorite with literary-minded undergraduates, and is exercising a healthy influence even on academic wits. Lionel Trilling's "The Sense of the Past" was remarkable and worth pondering over by many of us. The last issue has also some excellent reading-matter. It is too bad that, in a review so keenly and broad-mindedly interested in foreign letters, quotations or titles in foreign languages should not be the object of more care: e.g., p. 330, every one knows that the "Cornich" should be the "Corniche"; that (line 3), the "Roucas blanc" is perfect French and not Provencal; that the inhabitants of Marseille (p. 332) are the "Marseillais" and not the "Marseillants" (!!); that (p. 313) "costume d'interieur" never had a final "e"; that "oeuvres" (p. 313) should be feminine; etc.

Miss Allanah Harper's article is, at times, incredibly naive, as when she remarks how odd *Hamlet*, or any English poetry, sounds when turned into French, not realizing that the same is true of any French poetry translated into English. It is ridiculous to claim that, in 1929, no one had heard in France of Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Eliot and Lawrence. Bibliographies of translations and articles on those writers, and a glance at the files of the *Nouvelle Revue Francaise, Navire d'Argent, Revue Anglo-Americaine*, etc., would prove the contrary. As to Donne in France, Miss Harper took that excellent leg-puller, Fargue, too seriously. There had been at least 100 allusions to Donne in France before 1929, he had been lectured upon at the Sorbonne, studied by schoolboys and students for advanced English exams; at least one thesis in French had appeared on him, and dozens of articles.

It is also amusing to see Miss Harper, presumably a "leftist," so fascinated by pseudo-aristocratic salons, duchesses, princesses and ladies of the Armament Ring. There were other aspects of France to be looked at, if one went for it.

HENRI M. PEYRE

NEW HAVEN, CONN.

REPLY

Sirs:

I did not say, "how odd Hamlet, or any English poetry, sounds when turned into French", but "it is agony to read any French translation of Shakespeare, including Gide's", and went on to quote a line from Gide's Hamlet to illustrate my point—that Elisabethan English is unsuited to modern French. Some English poetry does not sound at all odd in French, and the same is true of some French poetry in English. It is obvious that the style of some poets or periods is more translatable than others. Racine, for instance is almost untranslatable into English; Rimbaud is not. The German early nineteenth century translation of Shakespeare is a masterpiece.

I am sure that M. Peyre knows about every single thesis written on Eliot, Lawrence and Virginia Woolf by a hundred pedagogues at a dozen seats of learning. I do not. All I know is that, at the time, these writers were not known to the educated and intelligent public, including writers as well as readers.

Fargue was not pulling my leg. His remark on Donne, which I quoted is the resumé of a number of conversations on the subject. Fargue was very excited about his discovery, not having been lectured to at the Sorbonne studying "for advanced English exams", indeed, not knowing any English at all, he had missed hearing about Donne and the "hundred allusions" to him in France.

The names of La Rochefoucauld and Polignac are hardly pseudo-aristocratic ones. (There have been at least ten thousand allusions to them for students of French history courses.) The salons that were good enough for Paul Valéry, André Gide, Léon Paul Fargue, Jules Supervielle, Léon Blum etc, were good enough for me.

In his hunt for mine and the P. R.'s spelling mistakes and printer's errors, M. Peyre did not discover the one mistake which makes me hang my head in shame —I spelt the name of the famous Abbé Mugnier, Meunier, which is unpardonable; and I am glad to have this opportunity for correcting it.

ALLANAH HARPER

PALISADES, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE CHIMERA
A ROUGH BEAST

[The new literary quarterly
that sold out its first number]

In the Autumn number, Volume I, Number 2:

THE BURNT NORTON TRILOGY
by PHILIP WHEELWRIGHT

A short story by Elaine Gottlieb; poems by June Cannan, Milton Klonsky, Eve Merriam, Clark Mills, Oscar Williams and others; reviews.

An original wood engraving by Leo Meissner

One dollar for the next three numbers

Address: THE CHIMERA • 2 East 93 St. • New York, N. Y.

Special Christmas Offer

One subscription for $1.50, two for $2.50, three for $3.00. Each additional subscription $1. Good until January 10, 1943. Include your own renewal if you wish. For each Canadian subscription add 15c a year; foreign, 30c a year.

PARTISAN REVIEW, 45 Astor Place, New York City

Enclosed find $..... Please send one year of Partisan Review to the following people.

NAME..... NAME.....
ADDRESS..... ADDRESS.....
....
NAME..... NAME.....
ADDRESS..... ADDRESS.....
....

Please { do / do not } send gift cards. DONOR'S NAME.....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the *to be* **importance** *to be*
of *to be* **the** *to be* **infinitive**
to be **is** *to be* **well** *to be* **illustrated** *to*
be **by** *to be* **the** *to be* **current** *to be* **View**

namely in No. 3 of the 2nd Series:

VERTIGO *by* ROGER CAILLOIS, with a drawing *by* KURT SELIGMANN; THE ENDLESS ISLAND, illustrated article on TCHELITCHEW's painting "Hide & Seek" *by* PARKER TYLER; THE NEW PROMETHEUS, challenging essay *by* NICOLAS CALAS, author of "Confound the Wise"; HOMAGE TO BATTLING SIKI (with photographs) *by* PAUL EATON REEVE; MALLARME: Portraitist of BAUDELAIRE & POE, a diagraph *by* ANDRE MASSON.

•

Poetry Section: Advice to the Young Poet by *William Carlos Williams;* Materia Poetica by *Wallace Stevens;* new verse by *Peter Wells, John Bayliss, Sanders Russell, Salvador Novo,* and *Charles Henri Ford;* DEATH ACCORDING TO HOMER: a little anthology from the Iliad.

•

2nd Series No. 4 will be AMERICANA FANTASTICA

•

Send 35c for a copy; or $1.00 for 4 numbers

•

Agent for booksellers: Gotham Book Mart, 51 W. 47th St., N. Y. C.

360 E. 55 **View** **New York**

Statement

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933 of Partisan Review, published bimonthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1942.

State of New York, County of New York, ss.:

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Nancy G. Macdonald, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that she is the Business Manager of the Partisan Review and that the following is, to the best of her knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are:
Publisher, Partisan Review, 45 Astor Place, New York City.
Editors, Clement Greenberg, 45 Astor Place, N. Y. C., Dwight Macdonald, 45 Astor Place, N. Y. C.; George L. K. Morris, 45 Astor Place, N. Y. C.; William Phillips, 45 Astor Place, N. Y. C.; Philip Rahv, 45 Astor Place, N. Y. C.
Managing Editor, None.
Business Manager, Nancy G. Macdonald, 45 Astor Place, N. Y. C.

2. That the owner is: Foundation for Cultural Experiment, Inc., 45 Astor Place, New York City. Pres. and Treas.: George L. K. Morris, 45 Astor Place, N. Y. C. Vice-Pres. and Sec'y: Dwight Macdonald, 45 Astor Place, N. Y. C. (A non-profit corporation organized under the membership laws of the State of New York.)

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by her.

(Signed) Nancy G. Macdonald, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of September, 1942. (Seal) Rubin Beyer, Notary Public, Bronx County. Bronx County Clerk's No. 172, Reg. No. 16159. N. Y. County Clerk's No. 943, Reg. No. 3B598. My commission expires March 30, 1943.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED